

Ganga Mata – A Prayer

O Ganges!
The dweller in Lord Brahma's *kamandala*
The abider in Lord Vishnu's feet
The resider in Lord Shiva's locks
The sojourner in the Himalayas
The daughter of Sage Jahnu
The co-wife to Parvati and Lakshmi
The redeemer of Bhagiratha's race
The atoner of Sagar's progeny
The mother of brave Bhishma
O *Ganga Maiya*!
Homage to thee.
Accept my obeisance
O *Punyakirti*!

I have come to your shore
Not just to sharpen my nerves with your waves
Not just to play with the fishes in you
Not just to have a boat ride in the wee hours
Not even to wash my sins
And to be pure again;
Nor am I satisfied
Just with a glimpse of yours.
Like a bird in a tree on your shore
I want to sing your praise
Like a tortoise in your water
I want to play in your lap
Like a dolphin in your floods
I want to ferry people to your banks
I want a small moorage
In an island created by you.

Allow me to have my way, O Suranadi!
Grant me my wish, O Girija!

Swargarohanvaijayanti bhavatim bhagirathi prathaye

Namo Gange mahottunge Trivikrama-padodbhave
Jai Shambhu-shirahsanthe Mandakini namo 'stu te

I don't want a kingship
I don't want a key to the treasure
I don't want a visa to the moon
I just want to live and die by you
Allow me to have a haven
By your feet, O Shailasuta!
My ears are eager to listen to
Evamastu uttered by you.
Grant me my wish, O Samudra-Mahishi!

Sarvasya sarvavyadhinam bhishakshreshthyai namo 'stu te

I am told
On the confluence, though vast,
No bathing *ghat* can be had
You keep changing your appearances --
Thousands you have in a day.
Why do you do it, can anybody say?

Mainaka comes daily to have
Your *darshana* and a holy dip.
But you go on an annual pilgrimage
To the Big Temple
And don't rest till you wash *Lord Hanumant*.

When I stand here
To have your *darshana*
I see only the white and the green waves
Piercing into each other

Like light into darkness
In a cloudy sky
You silently
Crush stones and push sand under
Your gorgeous feet
To help man raise
Buildings to touch the sky.
Where is the Saraswati?
What is her colour?
Where does she inhabit?
Why don't you allow
An island to come up here
And let me have a hutment there,
O *Papamochini*?

Gangam vari manohari murari-charana-chyutam
Tripurari-shirashchari papahari punatu mam.

Kuto vichirvichistava yadi gata lochanapatham
Tvamapita pitambarapuranasam vitarasi.

Yes, come *Magha*,
But no winter
No grains of wheat
No chilly winds
No blankets
No rains
No cereals
No *kumbh*, no tents, no crowd
No *sadhus*, no mendicants
No *nagas*, no music bands
No worship, no *arati*.
What has happened to you,
O *Gayatri*?
Are you testing the patience of man?

Are you displaying your displeasure,
O *Kirati*?
How can a mother be so cruel,
O *Adrija*?

Iyam sa te murtih sakala-sura-samsevya-salila
Mamantahsantapam trividhamatha tapam cha haratam.

O *Adhvaga*,
I find you feeble like a spine;
Where is your ravine?
Where have the rabbits gone?
Where have the blue bulls run?
Where have the deer-riding birds flown?
Where to find the boars and their hunters?

Where is the crocodile that pulled the elephant into your water?
Where is the monkey that fooled the lamb?
Your dancing spirit seems to have gone,
Your succour to the trees seems have evaporated,
Your curing power seems to have failed,
Your life giving force seems to have dried.
Is man more powerful than you,
O *Amar Sarita*?

Who has put you in chains, O *Amarapaga*!
Who has stopped your flow, O *Purandara*!
Who has dumped his waste in you, O *Sursari*!
Who has diverted your way, O *Bhagirathi*!
Why have you accepted it all, O *Tridhara*?
How have you tolerated it all, O *Saritamvara*?

Flow freely again
Overflow again
Dance rhythmically again
Be not bound by embankments and dams.

Let all power projects
Be shelved for ever.
I don't want electricity sans *Tripathaga*,
I don't want canals sans *Sudha*,
I don't want nuclear power sans *Tarpani*,
I don't want crops sans *Pavani*,
I don't want flora sans *Bhavayani*,
I don't want fauna sans *Bhagvatpadi*.
Om shantih, shantih, shantih.

I want the world
To be rid of corruption.
I want the world
To be rid of pollution.
I want the world
To be rid of degeneration.

I want the world
To be a home for all
I want the world
To be a wonder for all.

Let *Jahnavi* have the flow of milk again.
Let *Mandakini* nurture my fields again
Let *Jatashankari* meander her way again.

Vishnoh sangatkarini Hara-jatajutatavicharini
Prayashchittanivarini jalakanaih punyaughavistarini

'The wonder that was India'
Was the wonder of freedom of *Dev Sarita*
It was the wonder of the free flow of *Alakananda*.
It was the wonder of pure water of *Shuddha*
It was the wonder of humanity on the banks of *Samsartarini*
It was the wonder to grow in plenty with *Divya*
It was the wonder to share one's prosperity with *Purna*

It was the wonder to treat all alike with *Shatmukhi*
 It was the wonder to consider the earth a home like *Adya*
 It was the wonder to treat all with care like *Jagatpriya*.
 It was the wonder of the resplendent glory of *Tejaswini*
 It was the wonder of the powers of light of gleaming *Ratnavati*.
 It was the wonder to feel the plenty with a drop of *Vimalodaka*
 It was the wonder to feel healthy on the banks of *Vipasha*
 It was the victory song of the soul over matter
 It was the wonder to live with nature
 And not to open its entrails for pleasure
 It was the wonder to discuss the origin of time
 And not to impose the limits of time
 It was the wonder to believe in expanding the universe
 And exploring brotherhood with a dip in holy *Sarva*.
 How was it possible without your movement,
 O *Mrityubhayaha*?
 In movement lies life and in enchainment death.
 May you flow eternally in the hearts of people,
 O *Karunamayi*!

Alakanande paramanande kuru karunamayi katarvandye
Tava tatanikate yasya nivasah khalu vaikunthe tasya nivasah.

I don't want to bury
 The glories of the past;
 I don't want to fetter
 The freedom of the past;
 I don't want to gag
 The chanting of the *rishis*' mantras;
 I don't want to hide
 The development of the past;
 I don't want to ride
 The jet of the present;
 I don't want to bombard

The world with poison;
 I don't want to be a Blair
 Or a Clinton to enchain the world.
 I just want my *Ganga*
 To be my *Ganga*.

Om jai Gange mahajaiiii...!

What is the use
 Of my education --
 This engineering
 medicine
 agriculture
 law
 mathematics
 botany
 physics
 chemistry
 literature
 language
 commerce
 management

If I don't have my *Vishnupadi*?

What is the use
 Of my lovely house
 refrigerator, wife
 television, son
 car, daughter
 lawn, grandpa
 book-shelf, father
 furnace, niece
 hearth, grandma
 rolling mill, grand son
 egg plant, uncle,

radiogram, aunt
If I don't have my *Punyashloka*?

Devi sureshvari bhagvati gange tribhuvanatarini taralatarange
Shankara-mauliviharini vimale mam matirastam tava

The daughter
Has not to return
To her father.
The mother
Has not to complain
About her son.
The wife
Has not to protest
About her progeny.

If Brahma doesn't intervene
If Bhawani doesn't arise
If Yogeesh doesn't interpose
If Narayan keeps on sleeping
If Sarvamangala doesn't guide
If Saraswati doesn't enlighten
Who will mend
Man's ways?
And *Nandini*

How long
Will you keep on
Tolerating insult?
How long
Will you keep on
Protecting the race?
Arise, awake and
Redeem our progeny, O *Sagaraga*.

tvadamajjanat sajjano durjano va
vimanaih samanaih samaniyamnah
samayati tasmin puraratiloke
puradvara-samruddha-dikpalaloke.

From Kolkata to Gangotri
Just one scene —
Poverty, squalor, dirt, sloth and melancholy.
Everyone is weeping bitterly.
Everyone is crying hoarsely.
Everyone is worried knowingly.
No one has a solution!
Yes, India is one!
United we stand,
Divided we fall.

One voice
Ganga is ours —
Release Ganga —
Mokshadayini Ganga!

Gange tav darshanan muktih

Har har Gange,
Har har Gange.

Spineless - II

My conscience
Is like my pen
That exhausts its ink
In the examination hall.

My conscience
Is like my ferocious cat
That plays with timid rats
In the back junk yard.

My conscience
Is like my pudding
That is served without sugar
In a five-star hotel.

My conscience
Is like my cautious drive
That leads to an accident
On a busy highway.

My conscience
Is like my old father
Who forgets to return
To his ancestral home.

My conscience
Is like my vintage car
That refuses to move
At the appointed hour.

My conscience
Is like an electric bulb
That glows whole day
On the night-post.

My conscience
Is like the dew drops
That vanish in the morning sun
In my small garden.

My conscience
Is like the new tyre
That bursts in the noon sun
On the village hospital road.

My conscience
Is like the computer screen
That stares at me
When the UPS does not start.

My conscience
Is like the pigeon chicken
That wants to play
When the cat attacks.

My conscience
Is like an aeroplane
That does not take off
When fog enwraps the city.

Crisis

The other day I received a card
Inviting me to a function
On which was inscribed
'For madmen only'.

When they wanted me
To inaugurate the exhibition
They had written
'Admittance only to a few'.

When the show was thrown open by me once
The card had announced
'To Those Whom It May Concern'.

I have stopped going to cocktail parties now.
I am invited to functions where
There are no boundaries
Of colour, caste, creed, age, sex, likes and
dislikes, culture, -isms and -ages.

I don't have to look into
My wallet to find a piece of paper
To know who I am and to
Wear a mask accordingly.

I've embraced peace now.

Shattered Dreams

I

I have embraced my dreams.
You've converted them into reality
Which is as far away as were the dreams.

Sometimes I am panicky about the dreams
And, sometimes about the reality.

I still don't realize that
They are one in the present,
They were two in the past;
Their future troubles me.

II

I had built the castles of my dreams
On the sand dunes of a desert.

My imagination came falling down
Like the World Trade Centre.
Some dreams got stuck on my palm
Like stars on a night full of clouds.

I have been collecting the peeling sand
Like Bush gathering evidences against Laden.

I had weaved my dreams
To build the castle of imaginations
Like a weaver does to shelter its chicks.

It was a lighthouse
To the wandering barks of broken selves

Scattered on the ocean of timelessness

Whom should I punish
For attacking my Pentagon?
What evidence do I need
Against myself?

III

They have been telling me
To watch things in my dreams
On a regular basis
And to keep a record
Of the animals, rivers, mountains --
Of the men, women, children – girls as well as boys
Of the trees, stars and planets
Of the living and the dead
That share bed with me
Under the stars.

I have kept them hidden in their embankments
To make a show at a proper time
And at a proper place.
Like a juggler does.
I too shall spread
My wares to earn my wages.
My success will lie not in revealing
This much but in concealing that much.

My ears have stopped listening
My eyes have stopped watching
My tongue has stopped speaking
I'm just arranging my dreams
To reveal them at a proper time

At a proper place
To a proper seer.

Routine

It had been a regular day
Like many others that had passed unnoticed
Or, like the unknown face of a person in the crowded market
Or, like the unrecognisable face of a beggar at a mosque
Or, like the familiar faces one meets in one's street
Or, like the sights of the labourers
Raising up buildings unnoticed.

At least so I thought and kept on waiting
For the cosy office car
And the driver first blowing the horn
And then pressing the call bell
Before doing his courtly *salam*.

The endless wait was telling on my nerves
Like Sita must have felt
In Ashoka Vatika
Or, in Valmiki's Ashram
Or, during her *agni pariksha*.
The driver did not show up.
He was not to show up.
It was the first of July
And I had retired on the thirtieth of June.
I decided to walk on-foot
And become part of the multitude
I had an identity of my own.

Dilemma

People hated my grandpa
For he held his head high.
But, he narrated me wonderful stories
From various sources--
The *Mahabharata*, the *Ramayana*,
The *Iliad*, the *Bible*
This village and that city.

The most interesting ones were about
His own self and his father.
Sometimes he narrated stories about
His neighbours who had helped him and
Also about those who had not.

He was not a born poor
And had been raised like a prince.
He always was worried
About my father
Who couldn't be raised
As he should have been --
Holding his head high
Despite being poor.

Is it really possible for one
To remain poor and
Also to hold the head high?

Vicious Circle

Why did my uncle go to Basra
To fight a war or
To earn money for his family
I don't know.

I don't know if he knew the meaning of World War II
Or if he knew that he was sent there
As a number and not as a soldier.
Perhaps, he knew this for he went there
As a sick man in uniform
And to die there soon after
Never to return to his native land.

I wish I could see his clothes
And could keep them in a locked trunk.
Sometimes to kneel there, sometimes
To hear stories about the war front,
To know him well: to feel his body odour
To feel the actual shape of his arm and wrist.

An olive green signal beckons me
To tread his path.
I, too, have to earn bread for my family.

One Step Together

In being just one grief away
How close was he to me!
It was very easy to communicate with him.
I had gone
Sixty years towards him.
I am tired now
And cannot travel any more.
Is it my physical weakness?
Or, am I afraid of my future?
No, the journey is not very long
Just one step more
And one grief more
And it's all over.

Camouflage

When somebody asks me, 'How are you?'
I sulk away and say, 'I'm fine'.
Why don't I indulge in plain speaking?
Why do I shy away?

I wish I could show you the bits,
The bits that don't worry you.
But, how to hide the others
That's my problem. I don't want
You to know everyone in the class.

Some have tried to touch them
To get a 440 volt shock
Like a student who wanted to
Know the trick of biding time.
Overseer/Over seer/Over see er.
Hover around life styles but
Also learn
To pull curtains.

I want to be out.
'How are you?'
I take the nearest bed.

Grief

It is useless to
Wipe the tears of a poet.
He is lonely forever.
I remove loneliness
But he takes you to
The black holes of grief
The sun is nowhere in sight.
The icy coldness has gripped him
The sensitive spirit loves the
Flowers of hell
And the seasons of evil.
The tide will turn and
The full moon will rise.
He will jump from the window
To fathom a new image
Or a new grief.
That is not the end of the world.

Strings

The rising smoke
From my heart
Is an example of my consciousness
Not being dead.
Nor is the conscience
On the wane.

The list of research topics
Has not been exhausted;
New topics will emerge
When the fire is on.

How long have I been sleeping?
When will the dawn of realization take place
To catapult me into creativity
Shedding off the burden of nothingness.

Bringing in new books is
Like bringing in an empty pistol
Useless, but to be preserved
For a gratuitous moment.

The scrapbook is lost for good.
Memories don't have to stir me up.
Personages don't have to haunt me.
Addresses don't have to find me.

Dwellings

I have started
Living in the home of despair
For the house of hopes has been shattered
By volleys of jealousy.
First, the cobwebs of enemies spoilt it.
Then, it was the turn of dangerous curses
Spewed by holy men.
Yet I kept on serving
Dreams for dinner
But the child of innocence
Was not
On the way.
The tree of money sheds its leaves
For Autumn had come
But Spring could not
Locate my home.
Laden with colourful leaves
Hope passed by like a stranger on the road.
I salt my breakfast with tears
That ooze on the peeling of memories
When the butter of praise
Fails to soothe me
I go out to the arms of downstream
Where I drown in eternal sleep
To awake floating on a fresh dream.
Despair is good.
It remains untouched
By jealousies,
By enmities,
By curses.
It does not desert you suddenly

To make you a pauper
Like hopes often do.
It doesn't give you
Skin deep wounds
Like hopes often do.
It doesn't give you
A pirate's heart.
To run aground
On an alarm!

Meditation

I have been listening
To my silence
To fathom my darkness
That is deep enough.

I realize it is the jazzed dragonflies
In a dark pool of weeds
That don't let me sleep.

I breathe
Harder and harder.
I'm unable to clinch
My mantra.

Zippering unzipping the mantra
Doesn't help.
It slips
On the moss.

No chances of my salvation.
I remain a ruffian.
I have once again
Failed God.

Across the Lethe

I went to the *Sangam* the other day to talk to you
I had immersed you there
Just twenty years ago.
You were clinging to the pot,
As was your habit to cling to
Everything that gave you support,
Like a Devil's Ivy does,
In which you were tightly wrapped
With a piece of red cloth.
I had to use my hand
To loosen you from it
But you would not come out
As if you were in a comfortable zone.
I had to throw away the vase
In desperation. I was sick of you --
I had to get rid of you.

But, soon after my cleansing bath
In the *Sangam*
I paid the boatman
The asking price
To bring me the vase from his friend.
I have kept it in the drawing-room.
I dust it daily as a ritual
And gently keep it in the left corner
And sometimes in the right.

But everywhere it catches the
Attention of the newcomers
Who stare at its emptiness
Though it is full to the brim
With your memories - sweet and sour.

I again change its corner.
But it doesn't change.
I come to the *Sangam* to empty it.

But, you come and sit with me
And I reach home again to return to you
To see how I have failed once again
Even in throwing you out.

But are you powerless?
I am told you play on the *ghats*.
Your footprints on the mire prove it.

You narrate them my stories
When I am absent
And you come back to me
When I am present.

Let us cross the *Sangam*
To find out our empire
Where I and You
And You and I
Simply stare into each other's eyes
And be lost for ever
Beyond the recognisable.

Inquisitiveness

When my son asked me
The question of my coming to the earth
It was not full of innocence.
He wanted me to describe the details
Of the event.
'There was nothing unusual in it
It was like your coming to this earth.'
He sways in silence --
Wishes the video-taped version.
He was just six.
'Why don't I look like you?' parried his sister.
She was just four.
The question wasn't innocent.
She went and touched
The small flower on the tip of the cactus
To take out a drop of blood.
She wanted the DNA test to be performed.
My skin has lost its glow since then.
I brush their hair in bed.
Both of them fall asleep.
Tomorrow once again they'll ask
Questions – difficult questions.
It is now a usual story.

Tiny Tot

A toddler in a mother's lap
Pissing on an uncle
Or watering a shop's counter --
It's a joy to be young.

The buses pass, the cars pass
Let them rule
I have my ride.
It's a joy to be young.

Here it's not that cold
It's not that country for the old
I am too bold
It's a joy not for the old
I shall remain a toddler.

Death I fear not
Snakes I know not
Enemies caress me
No rewinding, no fast forward
No playing the fool around.
It's a joy to be young.

Handcuffed

I was foolish to trust myself and you.
I forget to add sugar to your tea.
The other man was staring at us.
He did not have a book in his hand.
But, his stare raised a storm in the cup.
He wanted to see you
Like a blizzard near the window.
It does not matter if the panes break.
Offering him some biscuits might help,
Hot tea can be overlooked.
Becoming Santa can save you.
The poem will not break afterwards,
I do not have to raise my fist
To punch him
And to turn him blue and black.
That's the way to save my tongue.

In the Lap of Nature

Below me, the lake
Beyond that, the dark China Peak
And above, a starry night
That summons
The craving moon
To enjoy the bliss
In the space between two stars.
Remaining unseen
I hold on --
Stretch my arms
To bring you to my folds.
The dream is entangled
In your eyes
Reflecting the moon.
I remain absent
I have to defy the law of gravity
To kiss you on your forehead
And make you sit in my drawing-room.
I have to cast my pearls before you
And, weave my dreams around you
To be away from the frigid earth.

Vanity

I want to live for some more time
My skin is hanging loose
Over the silver grey hair
Like rippled folds
Of a wrinkled bed sheet.

I have to gargle but I want to live.
I've to cough
And spit mouthfuls every ten minutes.
I am weak but I want to live.
I can't reach the toilet
And I use a pot every half an hour.
It hurts me to breathe
Right under here on the left.
I can't hear but I want to live.
I use signs
To make them believe
I want to live.

I don't want to die unsung.
I don't want to die unheard.
I don't want to die weak.

I'll defy nature
I'll defy age
I'll get stronger some day.
To die healthy any other day.

Reasons

Since I can't speak to you
I'm scribbling these lines.
Since I can't read them to you
I'm printing them.
Since I can't see you touch them
I'm leaving them to posterity.
Since I can't deliver them to you
I'm posting them on the web.

Saviour

I was dancing with joy
And was happy to see my height.
I was at the top,
Over every head.
Suddenly, I entered a cloud,
My joy knew no bounds;
I was enveloped by purest of vapours.
Soon I was seen rushing towards the sky
Eager to touch the Sun.
But, I was hit by an eagle;
No, it was not an accident;
It was sent to chase me --
Someone was jealous of my status --

But someone else was guarding me, too.
Now I was not fighting
But someone else was.
I was soon dancing in the sky
As I saw the eagle
Going down and down
Making a gyrating movement
To taste dust and to become so.

Poverty: Some Scenes

I

The encounter with poverty
Is most disturbing
At the railway platforms
When somebody opens the tiffin-box
And someone else just stares at it
With a hope of one morsel in one's mouth.
At the gate of the Hanuman Temple
I wanted to distribute fruits
To the hungry.
But, they had been driven away
By the police
To make poverty invisible
At important places.
Unimportant places can be ignored
During counting heads.
How to count heads --
Is also a point of debate
Amongst the intellectuals!

II

I have befriended her
And have assigned her a corner
In my room near a window.
She may run away
Through the window - if she is free.
But, I allure her

By feeding data into my computer.
 She is curious at every push.
 The data analysis may
 Loosen her grip
 And she will be pushed aside.
 But, every graph brings her
 To the centre stage.

III

I have seen her hiding
 Under the plate full of edibles in a party
 And under the lavish dress at a wedding
 And under the plastic paint
 In the newly constructed house.

There is a ball
 Thrown by my boss
 In my honour
 For getting an international recognition.

But, the uninvited guest
 Has been staring at me and
 Has some difficult questions
 On her face and
 Does not leave my sight.

IV

When was I hurt
 By her last--
 I have stopped taking a count?

Was it when my mother had died
 Giving me birth

Near big drain at Seelampur
 Or, when my sister had died
 Because of consumption – not medicated,
 Unattended, uncared for?

Hunger doesn't
 Trouble me anymore --
 I now know how to fight street dogs
 After a *brahma bhoja*
 In any locality.

I know clothes were useless
 For they obstructed
 A clear view of my body
 And I couldn't earn enough.
 Seasons don't affect me.

I can travel far and wide
 Ticketless in Indian railways--
 'The largest network of rails in the world' --
 To be in a soothing location.

V

At Balaghat junction
 Some street dogs
 Are pouncing on a pet dog.

The dog owner - a woman -
 Is trying to rescue the pet
 By shouting to scare them away.
 It is difficult for her to move and
 Help the dog.

The child that she is carrying
 May die even before birth.

She raises her hands
 Seeking intervention of God.
 The dog is released.
 The child is also released.

The mother heaves a sigh of relief.
 Now, she has to feed the baby
 With dry breasts.

The dog also sits nearby
 Staring at the mother
 With a curious mixture of
 Jealousy and gratitude in his eyes.

VI

Dickens was afraid
 Of her
 And so was Shaw.
 Shakespeare drew her away
 From home
 But kept her company in
 His theatre.
 I am an occasional visitor
 To Kalahandhi.

And have seen the images
 Flashed on U-Tube
 Of the people dying of
 Hunger and malaria--
 Bony and skinny people
 Black people
 Brown people
 Yellow people
 --men unable to stand

--women unable to walk
 --children unable to raise their hand
 Who can say 'Amen'?

VII

The UNO listens to their voice--
 Those who can't speak and
 Sends shiploads of edibles to them.
 Suddenly the guns chatter,
 No, they shout
 And spit out fire.

How can a man
 Who cannot hold himself
 Hold a gun
 To shower bullets?

It was a black magic
 Of black people --
 A trick on the whites.
 Their loaves were converted
 Into guns.

But, my son died
 There in Uganda.
 He was a brave captain
 Of the peace-keeping force.

Do I need to value
 Their obituary?

VIII

Katrina--

A fear for hoteliers
Tsunami--
A death blow to a factory
Typhoon--
A spine-mover to an electric company
Hurricane--
A sickening movement to a hospital

To me they are all the same:
Rain, water, leaves, trees, reptiles
I know how to live with them--
I have befriended them.
Stay put.
Stay put.

At the Hospital

Amidst the tossing heads
Jostling to get a space
In the crumbling building--
I saw white colour
Digging out deep-frozen hope
From the refrigerator of assurances
With a ferocious goodwill
To give you a deep cut
Near the naval.
The germs of spoof
Had already reached the operation theatre.
The gate keeper is feeding
His black cat
And watching the peels of the
Paint on the door and the walls.
Hope swims in the pool
Of money that will buy
Blood of the same group.
The heart jumps
Like a football
Crying 'Do this, do that'
'Ay, sister here, ay, sister there'.
Chain, plaster, lifting gear--
All useless.
Only the sky is silver.

Memories

While changing the mattress
I found your picture
Near my pillow--
You are smiling and
So is our son.
The colour is fading
But the smiles
Revive your memories.
The small son used
To tease me by lifting
My feet
And I in turn used
To push him over the pillow.
When both of us giggled at our pranks
You became furious.
The son used to
Soil the mattress
But you never minded it
And always changed places.
Now he has gone far away.
The mattress is also torn at places.
It needs a change.
The picture will go to the wall
And I to a new bed.
But where from are you,
Responding to my queries
So silently?

A Racist Attack

Ambitions glide
Unguided
And result in
Dreams unbridled.
The road leads
To crazy weapons
Meeting unknown denizens
In untraversed territories.
A beautiful picture is made
By an unknown artist
And hung at a convenient place.
For God's sake
Save me.

Mangoes

A mango stone
Carries the whole civilization in it.
One can begin one's day
With mango leaves at one's door
And offer mango *samidha* to god *havan*.
A mango leaf is needed to pour water
On every sacred occasion.
Even death and the dead
Can't ignore a mango.
The mango stone
Doesn't cry foul
Unlike the cracking bomb.
It puts the stomach disorders
In order.
It is ready to
Lie buried
Till a new plant grows into a tree
And under the shade
A cow rests
And yields milk
Not only to its calf
But also to the new born baby
Of the cowherd.

Struggle

I have seen
The bone resist
"Dust thou art;
and unto dust shalt thou return."

The flesh is weak
And gets burnt.
No petition is made for separation.
Wind takes away
The ash to an unknown destination.
The punishment for separation is severe
The hip feels
It has to carry
The child.
It resists and resists.

The bone speaks:
Stand up for unborn.
Don't burn kindness
Don't kill innocence
Don't murder pity
Don't show your apathy
I'm ready to face
The fury of fire.
The child does not cry.

Agony

Like a helpless woman
Gang raped unconcernedly again and again
Loses her natural vision
And
Just stares into blank sky above -
Perhaps praying to the invisible gods
To send some bolt
(Which never comes)
To identify and punish
The guilty.
Or just stares directly
Into the black faces
To identify and establish
The guilt
(which is rarely established)
Or
Like a caged bird
Shorn of its feathers
Waiting for some chicken-eater
To rescue it from
The public shame of being naked
(which no one does)
Or
Like a small kid
Yearning for help to hold her pen
From an angel like teacher
Gazes outside the new-school window
And keeps on crying
(the help never comes)
Or
Like a religious mother

Hopes for a miracle
To revive her only son
Killed in the Kargil War
(miracles don't happen these days)
Or
Like Dharmaraja and Dhananjaya
Remained unbudged
When Draupadi cried for help
On her modesty being violated by Duhshasan
The poet is crying for words.
Clad in unblemished white
Saraswati does not oblige.
She is busy riding a golden peacock.

Masquerade

My real age
Lies hidden behind my moustache
Which I hate dyeing.

Of late, I've started
Colouring my lips
To provide a contrast
To my dirty teeth -
Made so by my first love -
Betel-chewing.

Now you can discuss
Aristotle or Vatsyayan.
No foul smell from
My mouth - nor from
My ar.. .

My figure will appeal to you
You may call me
'The Faerie Queene'
I won't mind the sobriquet.
But don't call me
Papa or mamma or uncle or auntie
You need to address me differently --
New relationships!
New names!
No compulsions,
No cosmetics - no adhesives.
We aren't made for each other.

Relationships on a Holiday

Your letter tells me
It's a Sunday today
And, I don't have to dress up
To go to my college.

With you in bed this day won't be
Long, destitute, shaky, wasteful,
The heap of books
Will be learnt and finished--
Love is a sweeter word.

When the teachers don't teach
And the learners don't learn
A mower is needed
To clear the weed and
Sweets are needed
To lure the son.
The sun is to shine bright and
So have to I.
It's a Sunday today.

You've made friends
With everyday
So you don't need a Sunday
To make love
Or to transfer ideas
Or to follow the church wisdom
Or to enjoy *chaat* in Civil Lines.
Will you call on me again?

It's a Sunday today.
And I've to complete the weekly chores--
Washing, cleaning, clearing,

Dancing, swimming, bathing, street-strolling,
I am too busy today
To answer you today
Your letter reminds me
It's a Sunday today.

From Left to Right

This town is no more a town
But a city.
This city is no more sleepy and sleazy
But keeps you on your toes.
People come here
To become ashes
To be immersed in the confluence
Of the holy rivers.
The living ones too behave
Like the dead.
Sweating, bathing and breeding profusely
They are not tired of
Boasting about the
Glory that once was.
They are not tired of
Bragging about the
Achievement that once was.
Like a dog
Digs out the dry bone
Kept for a thin day
They bring out
Stories about their saints
Or about J Or I
Or about M or K
Or about the moving spirit
The rebel spirit
The crowned spirit.

Swan Song

As a child
I was proud
To have
A laboratory
Developing an aeroplane.

I felt
I was just a few feet away
From my God
Who lived on the seventh cloud
Or even nearer say, on the Mount Kailash.

I, my sister and cousins
Would invoke gods by singing songs
For an early delivery of the plane.
My mother and her mother
Would form the chorus
Eulogising the efforts
Of the scientists
Of my countrymen.
The world would soon
Fall at our door step.

One day--
After fifty years of search and selection
And research and rejection--
The pilot flying the plane
Hit my hut.

All was burnt
Save my dream
To make India
Proud and

Brave and
Strong and
Developed.

I shall not dump it
In the ground
For a penny.

I have sold dreams to the world
And will keep on doling
Them to the impoverished
With hungry bellies
To the naked
To the homeless
To the downtrodden.

Mirage

One way ticket to the moon
Is being sold.
The moon is the heavenly abode
Of gods. I've to reach there
Somehow.

Stand in the queue
Come after me
Be disciplined -
Like a child in the school
On the first day.

To meet the heavy rush
Various airlines are needed
The Maharaja is old now.
You need new airlines.
But, old pilots, older ships
Take you to the moon!
Don't joke - my life is precious.
But why do you worry -
Accidental and medical insurances are free
To all the travellers - your families won't suffer.
This brittle body is of no use
In the company of gods.
The Heaven is not to be polluted
With your odours.
Your dust
Doesn't match the dust there.

All tickets have been sold out.
New aeroplanes
Are being summoned

New pilots are being trained.

You may rest awhile
You may have a breather
Have some drinks
Don't worry if thirst is larger than life.

You've to be taken to the moon
To quench your thirst
In the heavenly abode.

Nithari and Beyond

O Yaksha! Don't look for
The snow-capped peaks or the fruit-laden gardens or
The high-rise multi-storeyed buildings or the fields of saffron
The well-dressed dancing troupes or grazing and racing deer
The professors discoursing on life after death
Or the young mendicants blowing conch in honour of gods
While looking for my abode.

When the intact skulls of the
Young innocent children are found
In the big drain behind the house,
When the mutilated organs of the
Young are found
Choking the drain across the door,
When the house owner feigns
Ignorance of the doings of the house-keeper
In the broad daylight,
When the parents next door
Are unwary of the
Shrieks of blood in the open veranda,
When the mothers in the homes
Are happy to abort female foetuses
In a clinic on the highway,
When the fathers stop
To keep a count of their children
Playing in parks,
When the old parents
Come out displaying their bruises
In the open courts,
When the students
Hit their teachers to their doom

On the premises of their colleges,
When the degrees
Are rendered worth rough papers
By those who award them,
Be sure you've reached India,
You have reached my abode,
O Yaksha!
You'll find me singing
I love my Indiaaaa... .

Gifts

When
The ant--
A small one, black in colour,
A microgram in weight
Runs at a speed
Higher than that of a jet,
I am put to shame
By my lord.

When
The tree--
Huge in size, that
Shed its leaves
Sprouts again this spring
To provide shelter to the
Homeless birds,
I am put to shame
By my Lord.

When
The cow--
Indian in size, Red in colour,
Heavy in white udders
Is separated from its calf
To milk it
For the market
I am put to shame
By my Lord.

When
The grain--
Minor in size, unimportant in colour

Less than a gram or two in weight
Sprouts to make a field green
To feed the hungry,
I am full of hope
By my Lord.

For a Bride Who Thinks of Suicide

Young brides are not meant for burning
Like sandal wood in a *yajña* or like the
Gas emitted from Mathura refinery
The flames of which leap to devour the sky.

Lovely brides are not meant for leaping
From the steel bridge constructed with German technology
Like the dolphins leaping playfully
In the air to display their giant size.

Decked brides should live - not lay
Their necks on railway tracks for the super fast trains
Like the desperate young men do
To show their alienation.

Glowing brides are not meant for overdosing
With sleeping pills
Like a crazy person does
In the newly erected hostel
Of the young working men
To show his helplessness.

Glittering brides are not meant for hanging
From a ceiling fan
Like a chandelier in the high walled church
To scatter light all around.

A bride belongs to a groom.
She is a flute to be played on
She is a harmonium to produce a rhythm.
She is a synthesizer to modulate a discordant note.
She is the tune of a young heart,
Full of music and meaning

Signifying harmony.

Brides are the carriers of tradition
Brides are the need of the civilization
Brides are the solace of bleeding hearts
Not to be trampled and kicked
But to be embalmed with care.

A Poem for My Country

Am I an Indian and my country India?
Doesn't the Indian Voter Identity Card
That I flaunt prove this?

I have seen the length and the breadth
Of this country in
A school atlas
Otherwise, I have just seen
The ground beneath my feet.
It appears to be fighting,
For its children,
The sea on the three sides,
Or is it just two?

Believers of various faiths
Users of so many tongues
Eaters of countless varieties of food
Dwell here in infinitum.
Life in coexistence is
Not an ancient slogan only
But a mantra
Practised by one and all.

Life for truth and
The life for shadows of truth
Form a collage along with
Shades of various hues.
There is no stranger here
That does not wear a sunglass
To be a passive spectator of sorrowful sight
The lake isle of hope is drowned.

The land offers you a sight of your choice --
A weeping child, destitute mother, naked faqir
Hungry farmer, homeless engineer,
Drug-addict father, free boarding house,
Free *langar* beseeching an empty belly,
A discourse on self and soul, this world and that world.
Metro-rail, sky-scrapers, space-shuttles,
Mobile revolution, educational satellites.

I laugh
I stifle
I choke
Lest my country visitor
Should feel awkward.

I call my country my motherland
And not my fatherland
I don't know, why.

Gopalpur on Sea

This listless town has been my home
For a month. Covered with groves of
Coconuts, mangoes, cashew nuts, bananas, kevrans,
It is bound by the Bay of Bengal.
The battle to win the sea,
To eat from its entrails,
Begins at four and without fail.

The white moonlight attracts the dark water
But who can touch the moon?
It roars blood and attacks
The sea-shore --
The camera of a tourist is swept away
But returned soon by frothy waves a few meters away.
After all, it is *ratnakar*.

The absence of the beloved moon
Tortures the Sea at Gopalpur
And, the beach reels
Before the white fangs of the roaring waves.
The fishermen don't dare to move forward
And their canoes and their motorboats take rest.

The fisherwomen whine and fight
The crow, the cat, and their poverty.
It is difficult to cover the body
Before the uncovering eye-sight
That penetrates from all sides.

The stench of mud, fish, crabs,
Competes with the
Fragrance from sweet-meat shops, fruit-laden
Peddlers and the ignited incense-sticks in the

Temples, mosques and churches.
But, the black smoke from scooters, motorbikes,
Cars, tempos, trucks, minibuses wins the race.
Gopalpur loses, the tourists win.

I went to the shore
To find my footprints
Engraved a month ago.
It was high tide and
It was drizzling.
The sea recognized me
And called from a distance
To give me a hug.
A voice from behind held me back.

Rivers

A poem like a river
Cannot be made.
The metaphors derive
From a river and
So are the crops and fruits.
A river cools
The scorched earth
By laying her arms around it
A hippo buries its head –
To suck milk from her breasts.
An elephant is drawn with its herd
To quench their thirst
In the scorching summer
To be dragged into deep waters by the waiting crocodile.
The trunk is raised and
A conch is blown.
A *dharmayuddha* starts
Between the poet and the poem
Between the word and the meaning
Between the critic and the poet.
The peacocks dance by the river
Raising their tales in the air
The deer run into the forest
Seeing the lion washing his face.
His roar wakes the sleeping poet
To tear apart the similes and the metaphors
The poem remains incomplete
The river flows into the sea.
Before late, the metaphor will swell into an epic.

Yama

O Death, will you find me
Watching her blue eyes
Deeper than a green lake?
Or will you shake me out of slumber
Before I'm tired of my loneliness
In this vast land full of heterogeneous people?

One day, I think, you'll find me
In the temple weeping
Near the deity, clutching its feet
To grant me my wish
To read music in her eyes.

The boat-ride with birds
Was a dream conceived
On the misty *ghats* --
You'll find me, O the lightest host,
Sipping tea from a mud-cup.

The call of the gong
The call of the wood
The call of the ripples
Prove that you are near.
I'm waiting for the dolphin
To ferry me ashore.
Om shantih, shantih, shantih!

Heavenly Love

I've received
An envelope from heaven
Carrying a letter
Having no message--
But God's signature on it.
I can inscribe
'Love' or 'Hate'
And can colour it pink or violet
And make its copies
To be sent all over.
Birds are chirping 'love'.
River ripples are making 'love'.
Ants carry 'love' in their feelers.
The blades of grass spread 'love'.
The buds of roses bloom into 'love'.
The mango trees are laden with 'love'.
The letter is no more blank
The road ahead is familiar.

O Beloved

I don't love you
For your dark, and thick hair,
They will vanish one day
One by one and will also turn silvery white.

I don't love you
For your disarming smile,
It will vanish some day stealthily
As your white teeth fall one by one.

I don't love you
For speaking so gently,
It will turn hoarse one day
As the vocal chords turn more thick and tense.

I don't love you
For your glittering tears,
They will dry with passing time
And lose their lustre with a changed emotion.

If I love you
I love you for God's sake
He is your creator
And a perennial source of eternal love.

Democracy: Old and New

In the beginning is my end.
And yours, O democracy?
You shout the people's voice
You proclaim the lowly's rights
You denounce the high and mighty
You promise food and shelter
You provide vote and choice
You showcase quality and liberty.
At your advent
The reign of terror is over.
At your advent
The voice of the 'one' is lost.
At your advent
The hope for many is there.
Where is the voice of Iraq?
Where is the voice of Vietnam?
Where is the voice of Afghanistan?
Where is the voice of the multitude?
Where have the arrows of Red Indians flown?
Where have the Brahmins of Goa gone?
Where is the Buddha in Bamiyan?
Why are the poisonous cigars sent to Cuba?
Why is Saddam allowed of bomb Kuwait?
Why are the innocents killed in Hiroshima?
Why has a Tony always to toe a Bush?
Why are stories planted against Emelda?
Why is a Mandela taken prisoner?
Why is Ceaușescu killed overnight?
Why is the UNO bulldozed?
Why does the International Court of Justice
Cease to be just?

'Fraternity' is a foul word.
Dreams become day-dreams.
Promises sound hollow.
Future evaporates into skies.
Time runs a full circle.
"Trust no future, howe'er pleasant!
Let the dead past bury its dead!"
I remain couched in my cushioned sofa
And ponder over
The philosophy of democracy.

A Wish

Think of the moments
When I scolded you furtively
Sometimes out of anxiety
Sometimes out of cruelty.
Think of the moments
That enraged me
And I lost control of my
Usual self and slapped you
On your left cheek
And sometimes on the right.
My blood pressure shot up
And I lost my vision.
Think of me
At such moments
When you are about
To slap your son
Or your wife.
Think of me
How miserably I spent
My days and nights
Without you and the world around!
Let your days with
Those around be
Peaceful, harmonious and soothing!

Bludgeoning of a Chance

I'm in your city
And you're away
I'm in your room
And you're astray
 Beyond the rules of wrath and tears,
 Beyond the goals of life and death,
 Beyond the traps of success and failure,
 Beyond the houses of gods and demons --
 Am I the master of my actions?
 Am I the master of my fate?
 Am I the master of my sins?
The horror of hell is beyond me.
The lure of heaven is beyond me.
I'm in your city
Alas, you're away!

Passing By

The scorching sun has turned my
 Hair grey;
 It attacked the head first
 Now the entire body is its target
 One by one;
 Neither the easterly wind
 Nor the westerly embalms and sooths.
 What turns grey
 Cannot turn black.

“The hopes were dupes, fears may be liars;
 It may be, in you smoke concealed”.

Now I realize the
 Hair turned grey
 Because of the smoke
 Of jealousy in my heart.

“You shall not covet your neighbour’s house; you shall not
 covet your neighbour’s wife, nor his manservant, nor his
 maidservant, nor his ox, nor his donkey, nor anything
 that is your neighbour’s.”

Is it really very easy to pray
 In the cathedral?
 Is it equally very easy to prey
 In the neighbourhood?

Granny

Today I’ve seen a brick come out of the wall
 In the ancestral house in the ancestral street.
 I tried to fix it without cement but it came out –
 I somehow saved my foot from being hurt.
 Twenty years ago my granny would not have let
 The wall go unrepaired – she would not have ordered for
 Cement, sand, water, necessary tools and that old mason
 Who knew the house by heart -- he had laid
 The foundation of the house as the youngest labourer.
 Twenty years ago one of her incisors also fell down.
 I wanted to take her to a doctor for its fixture.
 She refused. It was age and she didn’t want to be deceptive.
 “No painting and plastering of the old houses,” she declared.
 But, she engaged a big gang
 To repair, plaster and repaint the house
 When I went to meet her last. The arthritis
 Had impaired her joints and she protested
 When I suggested a knee replacement
 At my new mansion in Massachusetts.
 She preferred to spend her time before Lord Ganesha
 Asking for a peaceful time for me -
 Me - whom she couldn’t see anymore -
 She had lost her eyesight.
 She refused to accompany me saying
 “It was a country of *malechhas*.”
 “But the dollars are colourful.”
 I had protested. “You be happy with your notes.
 I’m happy with my Krishna – I give him butter
 And, he plays his flute for me. I’m happy.”
 It was in this corner I had argued with her.
 She died in this very corner. She was sitting

In her wheel-chair when she breathed her last.
She was remembering me. She wanted me
To take care of this house and make it my home.
The dreams are not the visions.

Colours

I

To see different patterns
Of life and leaves
One doesn't need
Spectacles or a kaleidoscope.
One can easily see
The bare tree
And the yellow leaves
Dancing from branches.
Some even from the heap
Being burnt by the gardener
Dance with joy
Around the trunk
And try to touch the bark.
Leaves are varied
They have different hues
And shapes and sizes.
Like men they reveal God's plenty.

II

Yesterday when I saw you
O butterfly
You were flying in the sky
In search of beautiful flowers
To collect honey
And help the flower bloom.
Your choice was a beautiful flower
Symmetrical, laughing, bright and blooming.
When you sat on its petals

The sight was captivating
As your colours and the backdrop of the flowerbed
Presented to my mind what
Must have been the Garden of Eden.
Your quest for honey in the grove of flowers
Must have been the quest of the enchanted Eve
To own Adam.
The pattern of colours on your body
O butterfly
Reminded me of the beauty of the innocent girls
Going to school on the reopening day
The enchanting patterns of design on your body
O butterfly
Reminded me of
Adam being enamoured by Eve.
Today when I saw you crushed
On the table
I couldn't even recognise you.
It was difficult to figure out
The pattern, the silkiness, the design, the body.
Alas, the laughter has gone
The movement has gone
The spark has gone
The chance of another Adam
Being tempted has withered.

Contemplation

I

There was a man
Who saw one moon
As he was passing through the jungle.
He was looking for a way out of the jungle.

There a man
Who saw one moon
As he was passing by a pond.
He was looking for drinking water somewhere.

There was a man
Who saw two moons
As he was getting a *chapati* after a fortnight.
He was undergoing a penance for exoneration of his sins.

There was a man
Who could not see a distinct moon
As was swimming in a river.
He was rescuing a child drowning in a river.

There was a man
Who saw only the moon
Scattered all around
As he drifted along with wind to catch a feather.
He was a poet living in a utopia.

II

It is better
My wife doesn't
Ask me questions

And lets me remain
A husband.
My sons do not
Ask me questions
And let me remain
A father.
So am I grateful
To my sisters and friends
Who know
A new book of revelations
Can be written
If they pester me
And goad me, cajole me
And persuade me
To show my seemingly
Unscathed skin.
The skeins would reveal
Multi-coloured pattern
If unwound and unwound.

Purgation

I

My sorrow was making me
Frail. So I thought to
Throw it out
Here, there, before and after
It came back to me
Every time ditching
Time and space.
I went over my mistakes again and again
And tried to harvest
The fruits, tainted by cinder clouds
Every time I found myself
Falling flat on my face
Bruised even more brutally
Against the nocturnal depths
Pushing me deeper into crevices
Teaching me to learn to
Hang myself with the
Umbilical cord of sorrow
Not trying to dispel it
Or dissolve it anymore.

II

How difficult is it to throw away my cigar?
I thought it was burning my sorrow and
Taking it away with its smoke
But the smoke flew away
Leaving my sorrow behind.
It was too heavy to be

Carried away by the smoke
Or to be burnt in the small
Fire of the tip of the cigar
Or it did not appear on
The tip at all to be burnt.
I have to look for alternative means
To purge myself of the sorrow.

III

The memory returns
Like Halley's Comet
Does after every seventy six years
To make me feel
That I've not grown an inch
Unlike the wild fire
That threatens to kill
An orangutang.

IV

God has been very kind to me
He allowed me to have a dream
About plants, animals, creatures,
Colleagues, family and this life.
Sometimes I fear if the boundless dream
May come true.
Sometimes I pray fervently for
The sparkling dream coming true.
God has granted all my wishes.
How long will God keep my life
Enriched and embellished in a harrowing world
I sometimes wonder.

Or how long should
I keep him busy with myself
I sometimes ponder.
Clouds of abject poverty,
Growing scarcity of clean drinking water
Roads becoming narrower every day
Canals growing dry with every passing day
Diseases turning epidemics within hours
Gold converting into plastic every moment
Diamonds changing into bloody diamonds
Dead bodies moving out of their graves
Headless corpses jostling in the market
Swelling problems on and on, all around.
I have kept him too much busy
With me, myself and my problems.

V

A conch is rising from the lotus.
The conch is covered with
A design of a world.
The world is a jungle.
The jungle is burning.
Fire consumes sins.

Fire consumes virtues.
After purgation
Nothing remains.
Brahma is revealed.

Hope is the Last Thing to Be Lost

I

The damp dream
Was being dried in the open
When the Sun was covered
With green clouds.

The dream could not be
Dehydrated then.
It was kept
In the electric oven.
It emitted black light there.
We thought it was roasted
And could be had at the tea-time.

The voice cracking the dream
Remained faint
The key could no more be turned
The dream was not yet impregnated.

Was it not a mistake
To have dreams
At tea-time?

II

Many souls have burnt themselves
In the eternal Pentecostal fire
To purge themselves
Of the worldly material.

Their dreams were dreary

Their prayer not-attached
They wanted to put off
Sense and notion;
To find order in disorder was
Their chief prayer.

The sound of the voice
And, the sound of the noise
Are not much different.
The praying mind discerns
The right sound
And, listens to the Lord's clicks.

The world does not listen
To the praying mind
And gets involved
In the incendiary war.
The plant listens
With gaiety
And is saved.

Will the posterity think
Of Brahman and become infinite?
Or, will it be carried
To taste the forbidden fruit
To fall asunder?

III

I want to learn
The art of caring
And, of not caring.

Who will teach me
To tread the path of

Walking on the sword's edge?

The Guru has meandered through
The jungle of temptations
And has come out
Shining like a moonlit dome of the Taj
Or like a flagship from the Tsunami?

The one who abandoned his wife and son
Sleeping on the couch
The one who renounced his throne
The one who was beckoned
To become the light of the world
Is suggesting the way out.

Be your own Buddha
Be your own enlightened soul
To realize the reality
And to shun
Whatever is false
Whatever worldly
Whatever comely.

By watching the breath
Going in and going out
One can know
What to do
What to know and
What not to know
What to embrace and what to shun.

Be your own Buddha
To find the garden
Among the rocks
To salvage the savage.

IV

Sitting still is a great task.
I just have to watch my breath
And forget all my projects
And, agendas.
I've to forget my body
And, the ant's crawling over it
And, the mind boggling games
To turn the government upside down.

Breath is the only reality.
The smell of simmering *samosas* doesn't matter
Nor does the sweaty smell of the body
Nor even the aroma of South Indian Coffee.
Skin below the nostrils is the only reality.

I've come a long way
To learn this art
Of sitting still and
Of watching the breath
And turning the back on
The baggage of nostalgic memories.

The world is at my door steps.
People don't salute me anymore
They just fall down on their knees
And, bow down to touch my feet
And, seek my blessings
As they did to Buddha.

The world will live longer now,
There won't be any War
Over the issue of water
Nor, to capture Oil Fields

Even the power of Atom will remain dormant.
Neither will be required space-ships
Nor will be required space-covers.

The earth, my earth, has become
A safer heaven
I thank you Lord
For teaching me
To sit silently.
I thank you Buddha
For teaching me
To sit silently.

V

If it was easy to insert
Blood in his sight
And speak knife in his voice
The water could be boiled on his back.
The country would be free
And the race redeemed.
The hatred gone
Love remains
I remain
Yes,
The *dravida*, the untouchable,
The nigger, the outcaste
Will wither
Angst will be gone.

VI

Hope descends from the sky
Spreading its wings

Around me like a dove
To safeguard its chicken.

Hope descends from the rising sun
That waits patiently to shine
As the dark clouds disperse
Under the stroke of sharp wind.

Hope comes from the busy bee
That engages itself every winter to make
A new beehive –
To store honey
Knowing fully well that
Angry hungry humans
Wait for the opportune moment
To plunder honey and render
It homeless.

Hope radiates from the monk
Who sits patiently on the Ganga Ghat
For salvation to descend on him and his disciple.
The world does not move
If he does not get peace within.

Hope has some feathers
To wrap me around as
I shiver traversing the Naini Lake
On the lower Mall near the Library.

Hope gives me courage to
Enter the gates of the Operation Theatre
To touch the etherised patient
Lying restful to get rid of the pain
That moves his conscience
Now and then.

Hope gives me courage
To enter the gates of Heaven
Where I have to face God
To accept my retribution.

Liberation at Varanasi

I turn to you, O Varanasi,
In the moments of anxiety
When faith has been lost
And love not found
In the streets of London
And democracy has been strangled
On the pavements of Washington.
Strolling on the roads
A bull stares at me
And a boatman beckons me.
The calm water of the Ganges
Tempts me to watch the floating lamps
The morning mist enwraps me with music.
The call of the gong from *Shivalaya*
The enthralling shouts, '*Har har Gange*'
The exuberant dance, '*Har har Mahadev*'
The melodious violin, '*Jai Bhole Ki*'
The enchanting hymns in
The rapturous *holi*
Beckon me to your lap, O Varanasi!
Annapurna's call from the narrow streets
To have my fill with
Idlis, kachauri, halwa and puri,
Shiva's call from every corner
To have my fill with
Smoke, *ganja, bhang* and *thandai*
Saraswati's call from the *pathashalas*
To have my fill with
Jñāna, karma, bhakti and *moksha*
Brings me to thy lap O Varanasi!
I ponder, I stare, I wait

I hold my breath, I look within
 When I see lit pyres
 I chant
Om Namah Shivaya.
 Is it *vairagya*
 That brings me to Varanasi?
 Or is it my over indulgence
 In the worldly affairs?
 If the world can survive
 Through wars
 If the world can survive
 Through penury
 If the world can survive
 Through discrimination
 If the world can survive
 Through pollution
 If the world can survive
 Through pestilences
 If the world can survive
 Through ravages
 If I can just survive by meditation
 If I can just survive by '*Shivoham*'.
 It is a call to find answers
 On the banks of the Ganges and
 In thy narrow streets
 That brings me to you, O Varanasi.

Glossary

[Words convey ideas imbued with cultural significance which is mostly lost in translation. It is all the more difficult to translate proper nouns. In India, for example, there exists a tradition of *Sahasranama* (one thousand names of the object of one's reverence) where every word connotes a meaning embellished with physical or other characteristics such as history, geography, culture, myth, literary reference etc. The multiple words for an object in one's mother-tongue/ culture pose a challenge to a bilingual/ multi-cultural poet who writes in a different language in which this sort of plenty may not be there for a number of reasons. English, for example, has just one word for the Ganges which conveys the sense of only a water body while there are one thousand words for it in the Indian tradition in the form of *Ganga Sahasranama*. In such a situation the poet is left with no option but to use the words from the tradition that s/he has imbibed and to give a *Glossary* to help a serious reader in getting a feel of the idea. However, only 43 synonyms of the Ganges have been used in the first poem in the collection. Other such expressions that may need a reference/explanation have also found a place in it.]

Adhvaga: A wanderer; a synonym of the Ganges.

Adrija: Born/ found on a mountain; a synonym of the Ganges.

Adya: The first one to spring up; a synonym of the Ganges

agni pariksha: Literally a test in which a person has to pass through the flames where fire would destroy the impure and sinful, but not touch the pure and innocent; figuratively any difficult examination; Sita had to prove her loyalty and chastity by undergoing this test before being accepted by Ram on his return to Ayodhya.

Alakananda: A river flowing in the kingdom of Kuber, Alkapuri; a synonym of the Ganges.

Alakanande paramanande kuru karunamayi katarvandye:
Shankaracharya's *Shri Gangastrotam* (l. 19) You that provide highest sort of bliss to those living in Alkapuri; you that are benevolent and are worshipped by all those who are suffering, bless me.

Amar Sarita: An immortal river; an epithet of the Ganges.

Amarapaga: An uninterrupted flow (path); an epithet of the Ganges

Annapurna: One who is full, complete and perfect with food and grains; one who gives nourishment; epithet of goddess Parvati.

arati: A Hindu ritual of worship in which light from wicks soaked in ghee (purified butter) or camphor is waved in a clock-wise motion before the image/idol of the deity generally to the accompaniment of songs in praise of the deity. In doing so, the plate or lamp is supposed to acquire the power of the deity.

Ashoka Vatika: A grove of Ashoka (literally without sorrow) trees (*Saraca asoca*). Sita was kept in Ashoka Vatika after she was abducted by Ravana. This tree is good especially for the health and mood of women.

Bhagiratha: An ancient King of the solar dynasty; great grandson of Sagar, King of Ayodhya; he brought down the celestial Ganga from the Heaven to the Earth and then to the lower regions to purify the ashes of his great ancestors, the sons of Sagar (see Sagar).

Bhagirathi: The daughter of Bhagiratha; a result of the efforts of Bhagiratha (see supra); a synonym of the Ganges.

Bhagvatpadi: As important as God himself; an attribute of the Ganges.

bhakti: Devotion; one of the ways to achieve *moksha* (Krishna).

bhang: An intoxicating plant; Indian hemp; botanical name *Cannabis Sativa* Linn; offered to Lord Shiva.

Bhavani: A synonym of Parvati; literally someone who helps in crossing the ocean of life and death.

Bhavayani: One that helps in coming out of the forest of worldly life; something that arrives into the world (from Heaven); an epithet of the Ganges.

Bhishma: The youngest son of Shantanu and Ganga; grandfather of Kauravas and Pandavas; known as a brave warrior; famous for his vow.

Brahma: The first deity of the sacred Hindu Trinity to whom is entrusted the task of creating the world. He carries a *Kamandala* (a pot) in one of his right hands. Ganga inhabited in his *Kamandala* (see *infra*) before falling on the head of Shiva.

brahma bhoja: Feeding Brahmins on different social and religious occasions with delicious, pure, simple food, *sattvik* in nature (completely vegetarian including the non-usage of onions and garlic). The basic idea behind *brahma bhoja* is to get the blessings of the Brahmins. The members of the host family usually participate in serving the Brahmins.

brahmins: Members of the priestly class; well versed in Vedic texts and sacred knowledge.

chaat: Savoury snacks usually served with tangy-salty spices, saunth (a sauce consisting of dried ginger, jaggery, some dry fruits and tamarind), *chutney* (a paste of fresh green coriander leaves, dried mango powder, salt and chillies etc.) and yogurt; sold at typical road-side stalls.

chapati: Indian flatbread; a flat pancake like bread, usually of whole-wheat flour, baked on a griddle.

darshana: To become visible; to show; to exhibit; to give an audience to someone on a lower pedestal.

Dev Sarita: A divine river; a synonym of the Ganges.

Devi sureshvari bhagvati gange tribhuvanatarini taralatarange:
Shankaracharya's *Shri Gangastrotam* (l. 1), O Goddess of

the gods, O goddess Ganges you help in coming out of sorrows in the three *lokas* with your lovely fluid waves.

Dhananjaya: Conqueror of wealth; a synonym of Arjun, one of the Pandavas in the *Mahabharata*.

Dharmaraja: An upholder of *Dharma* (righteousness) and truth; an attribute of Yudhishtir, the eldest of the Pandavas in the *Mahabharata*.

dharmayuddha: A war for establishment of righteousness, truth, peace and order.

Divya: One that radiates light; a synonym of the Ganges.

Draupadi: A character in the *Mahabharata*; a common wife to five Pandavas viz. Yudhishtir, Bhima, Arjun, Nakul and Sahdeo. She is one among the five *kanyas* (virgins) viz. Ahilya, Draupadi, Kunti, Tara and Mandodari in Indian tradition.

dravida: The ethnic group in South India; the area described in the Indian anthem where Dravidian languages are used.

Duhshasan: A character in the *Mahabharata*, a younger Kaurav; he was asked by Duryodhana to outrage the modesty of Draupadi in the royal court in presence of all the elders.

Evamastu: Let it be so; generally a god/goddess will grant the wishes of the seeker by uttering this word.

Ganga: Literally a water body which flows in transverse movement making a gurgling sound; mythologically, the youngest daughter of Himvant; because of a curse of Brahma she was compelled to fall down on the earth where she became the wife of Shantanu and bore him eight sons. Geographically speaking, it is the largest river of the Indian subcontinent (2,510 km) that rises in the western Himalayas and flows east through the Gangetic Plain of northern India. All major rivers in the northern and eastern India meet it at some place or the other before it falls into the Bay of Bengal. Their confluence(s)), called Prayag(s), is/are both culturally and

religiously important. The six main headstreams that form this river in the Himalayas are the Alaknanda, the Dhauliganga, the Nandakini, the Pindar, the Mandakini and the Bhagirathi. The Bhagirathi is considered to be the source stream; it rises at the foot of Gangotri Glacier, at Gaumukh, at an elevation of 3,892 m. It is believed that the Mandakini represents the Heaven (*Swarga Loka*), the Bhagirathi the Earth (*Bhu Loka*) and the Alakananda the Nether World (*Patal Loka*). At Allahabad (called Tirtharaj Prayag) it meets the Yamuna, another significant river and the legendary Saraswati. Jawaharlal Nehru in his *Discovery of India* has talked about the significance of the river in the following words: “The Ganges ... has held India’s heart captive and drawn uncounted millions to her banks since the dawn of history. The story of the Ganges, from her source to the sea, from old times to new, is the story of India’s civilization and culture, of the rise and fall of empires, of great and proud cities, of adventures of man”

Gangam vari manohari murari-charana-chyutam: Valmiki’s *Shri Gangastrotram* (l. 25); the holy water of the Ganges is very tranquil, serene and charming and flows out of the feet of Murari (Vishnu).

Gange tav darshanan muktiḥ: a traditional verse about the importance of the Ganges; Ganga, even a look at you will release one from the worldly affairs.

Gangotri: The geographical place where water from the melting glacier forms a rivulet; Bhagiratha is believed to have performed his penance there.

ganja: Dried leaves and flowers etc of the plant genus, *Cannabis*; intended for use as a psychoactive drug; largely used for religious or spiritual and medicinal purposes by Indian *sadhus* and mendicants.

Gayatri: A synonym of the Ganges; a Vedic metre of 24 syllables; a very sacred verse chanted by Hindus; a goddess.

ghat(s): A bathing place on the bank of a river where its depth can be negotiated to take a holy dip; a *pucca ghat* is a special type of embankment where there are long flights of wide stone steps leading down to the river to help people in reaching the place of bathing.

Girija: born of mountain; a synonym of both the Ganges and Parvati

halwa: A type of dense, sweet confection; usually offered to gods and distributed to devotees as *Prasad(am)* (edible gift). The main ingredients are grain flour, clarified butter, dry fruits, and sugar.

Hanuman: A deity who is an ardent devotee of Ram; the son of Anjana and god Wind (Pavan); a character in the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*; a general among the ape-like race of forest-dwellers; represents celibacy, great strength, wisdom and knowledge; an incarnation of the divine, whose fate is to aid the hero Ram in the struggle against the demon king Ravana; his exploits are much celebrated in a variety of religious and cultural traditions.

Hanumant [Lord]: A synonym of Hanuman.

Har har Gange: The moving water of the Ganges that creates a musical sound. The people who go to have a holy dip in the Ganges often use the phrase as a slogan.

Har har Mahadev: An exuberant cry of joy in praise of Lord Shiva

havan: It is a term for a sacred purifying ritual (*yajña*) in Hinduism that involves a fire ceremony. It is a ritual of sacrifice made to the fire god (Agni). After lighting a *Havan Kund* (sacrificial fire), objects such as pieces of wood, camphor, clarified butter (ghee), honey and dry fruits are put into it while chanting sacred mantras. (see *yajña*)

Holi: A spring festival celebrated on the last full moon day of the lunar month Phalguna (February/March); a major

festival in Braj region, which lasts up to sixteen days; the main day is celebrated by people by throwing coloured powder and coloured water at each other. Bonfires are lit a day before in memory of the miraculous escape that young Prahlad had when Demoness Holika, sister of Hiranyakashipu, carried him into the fire. Holika was burnt but Prahlad, a staunch devotee of Lord Vishnu, escaped unhurt owing to his unshakable devotion.

idli(s): A savoury cake usually two to three inches in diameter made by steaming a batter consisting of fermented black lentils (de-husked) and rice; usually had for a breakfast in Southern India.

Iyam sa te murtih sakala-sura-samsevyā-salila: (Panditaraja Jagannatha's *Gangalahari*, 4) This image of you, whose water is consumed by all the gods.

Jagatpriya: One who is loved by the world; a synonym of the Ganges.

Jai Bhole Ki: Victory to Shiva – an exuberant exclamation in praise of Lord Shiva.

Jai Shambhu-shirahsanthe Mandakini namo'stu te: (Sri Skand Purana, Ganga Gauri Samvada, 18) O located on the head of Lord Shiva, Ganga, I bow down before you.

jñāna: Knowledge inseparable from the total experience of reality, especially a total reality, or Supreme Being; a cognitive event which is recognized when experienced.

Jahnu: An ancient Indian king/ sage. When Ganga came to the earth after being released from Lord Shiva's locks, her torrential waters wreaked havoc on Jahnu's fields and penance. Angered by this, the great sage drank up all of Ganga's waters to punish her. The gods and the sages, particularly Bhagiratha, appeased him and he relented and released Ganga from his ear. For this, the river Ganges is also known as *Jahnavi*.

Jahnavi: Literal meaning 'daughter of Jahnu' (see supra); a synonym of the Ganges.

Jatashankari: One who dwells in the locks of Shiva; a synonym of the Ganges.

kachauri: A round flattened ball made of fine flour filled with a stuffing of baked mixture of unhusked *moong dal* or *urad dal* (crushed and washed green or black horse beans), *besan* (washed and crushed gram flour), black pepper, red chilli powder, salt and other spices and deep fried in fat.

Kailash [Mount]: A sacred place in four religions: Bön, Buddhism, Hinduism, Jainism; for Hindus it is the abode of Lord Shiva and a place of eternal bliss.

kamandala: An oblong water pot made of a dry gourd (pumpkin) or coconut shell or metal or wood of Kamandalataru tree or from clay, usually with a handle and sometimes with a spout, invariably carried by ascetics; often used for storing water and food; a symbol of asceticism.

karma: One's actions - mental, vocal and physical are one's Karma; Karma is a word from the philosophy of many Indian religions. According to it the universe runs according to certain laws, all described by one word 'Dharma'. The laws (Dharma) decide what affect is beget from a given cause. Karma is the 'cause' part of this theory.

Karunamayi: One who is full of pity for others; a synonym of the Ganges

kevr(s): It is a shrub with fragrant flowers (*Pandanus fascicularis*). It is used to flavour food; its perfume and aromatic oil are used as stimulant and antispasmodic. The flower is mentioned in the Brahma's story as the cursed flower.

Kirati: One who originates from the locks of Kirat (Shiva); a synonym of the Ganges.

Kolkata: An ancient name for Calcutta, now revived.

kumbh: A pitcher; after the churning of the *Kshira Sagar* for *amrit* (the nectar of immortality) when the *kumbh* (urn) containing

the *amrit* appeared, a fight for the pot ensued between the churning parties i.e. *suras* (gods) and *asuras* (demons), which went on for twelve days (twelve human years) in the life of the demigods. It is believed that during the battle, Indra's son Jayant, flew away with the *kumbh* spilling drops of *amrit* at four places: Haridwar, Nasik, Prayag (Allahabad) and Ujjain; a *kumbh (mela)*, a big event of massive pilgrimage, is organised at these four places at an interval of twelve years under the zodiac sign Aquarius. *Ardh Kumbh* (literally half pitcher) is held at every six years. Each site's celebration dates are calculated in advance according to a special combination of zodiacal positions of the Sun, the Moon, and the Jupiter.

Kuto vichirvichistava yadi gata lochanapatham: If your waves appear before eyes where will the waves (of the worldiness) stay?

Lakshmi: The wife of Vishnu; goddess of wealth; one of the fourteen precious objects (*ratnas*, jewels) that came out of the churning of the ocean for nectar.

langar: A community meal where vegetarian food is served to people regardless of religion, caste, colour, creed, age, gender or social status; expresses the ethics of sharing, inclusiveness and oneness of all humankind.

Magha: One of the twelve months in Indian solar and lunar calendars; a big fair is held for a month at Allahabad on the banks of the Ganges in the month of Magha in which a large number of saints from various Hindu sects participate.

Mahabharata: The great tale of the Bharata dynasty; a great war; an epic, roughly ten times the length of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* combined, scribbled by Lord Ganesha and dictated by Sage Vyas; contains much philosophical and devotional material; a guide for a full view of life.

Mahadev: Literally a great god; a synonym for Shiva.

Mainaka: The son of Himalaya and Maina; the only mountain to have retained its wings while Indra clipped those of the others; tried to help Hanuman by providing a platform to rest when he was going to Lanka in search of Sita.

Maiya: A word of affection for mother.

Mata: mother; used with the names of goddesses; according to Vedic culture, all women who are not one's wife are to be treated as one's mother.

Malechha(s): A person of unclean habits and *tamsik vritti*; an outcaste, a very low man; a sinner, a wicked person; a barbarian, a foreigner in general.

Mamantahsantapam trividhamatha tapam cha haratam: (Panditaraja Jagannatha's *Gangalahari*, 4) May she mitigate my internal agony and also the three types of afflictions!

Mandakini: A river having a slow flow; a celestial river; a synonym for the Ganges.

Mrityubhayaha: One that helps in overpowering the fear of death; a synonym of the Ganges

moksha: A condition in which one is liberated from time, place and the cycle of birth and rebirth.

Mokshadayini: One that provides *moksha*; an attribute of the Ganges.

naga(s): Scantly clad saints who are non-shaven and wear their hair in thick locks. Hindu *naga* saints were organised and trained to combat all sorts of onslaughts; they often flaunt their arms and display their military skills; Shiva is the first *naga*.

Namo Gange mahottunge Trivikrama-padodbhave: (Sri *Skand Purana*, Ganga Gauri Samvada, 18) O Ganga! O very high one! O born from the feet of Trivikram (Lord Vishnu)

Nandini: Something that provides happiness; an epithet of the Ganges.

Narayan: One who resides in water; a synonym of Lord Vishnu.

Om jai Gange mahajaiiii... : Victory to thee O Ganga; an exuberant exclamation.

Om Namah Shivaya: I bow to thee O Shiva; one among the foremost mantras.

Om shantih, shantih, shantih: A wish for peace; the last line of any Hindu prayer where it is prayed that peace be bestowed on every creature in all the realms. 'Shantih' is uttered three times not for emphasis but because disturbances are of three distinct categories. In Sanskrit, these are referred to as *adhi-daivikam* (originating from the gods), *adhi-bhautikam* (originating from the world) and *adhyatmikam* (originating from the self).

Papamochini: Something that relieves one of sins; an attribute of the Ganges.

Parvati: One who is born of a mountain; Shiva's wife.

pathashala(s): An academy of traditional/ Sanskrit learning; they were/ are patronised by various sects and are generally located in all religious and cultural places.

Pavani: Purificatory, sanctifying, freeing; a synonym of the Ganges.

Prayashchittanivarini jalakanaih punyayughavistarini: (Kalidasa's *Gangashtaka Stotra*, 6) One who dispels the remorse, one who extends a good deal of righteousness through her drops of water;

Punyakirti: An auspicious fame; bearing good or holy name; a synonym of the Ganges.

Punyashloka: An auspicious utterance; something the chanting of which is auspicious; a synonym of the Ganges.

Purandara: A great force that destroys every impediment on its way; an epithet of the Ganges.

Puri: An unleavened, unstuffed, flaky, flattened wheat dough that is deep-fried in fat and served hot.

Purna: One that is perfect; a synonym of the Ganges.

Ramayana: Literally Ram's going on a journey; an epic about Ram's life by sage Valmiki; not just seen as a literary monument as it serves as an integral part of the Hindu canon; there are several versions of the *Ramayana* in different languages and

geographical areas of the world; in Hindu (particularly the *Vaishnava*) tradition, Ram is an incarnation (*Avatar*) of the God Vishnu. The main purpose of this incarnation is to demonstrate the righteous path (*dharma*) for all living creatures on earth.

Ratnakar: A repository of gems; a synonym of 'sea'.

Ratnavati: Having the gleam of jewels; a synonym of the Ganges.

rishi: An inspired sage; a singer of the Vedic hymns; a class of beings distinct from gods, *asuras* and men.

sadhu(s): An ascetic; a holy man.

Sagar: A king of solar race, son of Bahuani; he was given this name because he was born with poison given to his mother by the other wife of his father; he had 60,000 sons with his wife Sumati. He performed 99 *Ashwamedha* (horse sacrifice) *yajñas* successfully. Fearing the success of his 100th *yajña* Indra stole away his sacrificial horse and left it at the hermitage (ashram) of Sage Kapiladeva who was in deep meditation. Sagar's sons went in search of it and found the horse at Kapila's ashram. Taking Kapila to be the culprit they prepared to punish the meditating *rishi* (sage); but Kapila opened his eyes and reduced them to ashes then and there. Later King Sagar sent his grandson Anshuman to retrieve the horse. Kapila returned the horse and told Anshuman that the sons of King Sagar could be delivered if the Ganges descended to the Earth and bathed them in her water. King Sagar's great-great-grandson, Bhagiratha, eventually pleased Mother Ganga, and asked her to come to the earth. After the Ganga fell down on the ashes all the sons got alive and were given their eternal position.

Sagaraga: A river that flows into the ocean; an attribute of the Ganges.

samayati tasmin puraratiloke/ puradvara-samruddha-dikpalaloke: (Kalidasa's *Gangashtaka*, 3) in whose city the *dikpalas*

(guards of the directions) are standing to restrict the entry into its gates

samidha: The pieces of wood and other items that are offered in a *yajña* (see Havan).

samosa(s): A type of spicy snack usually served hot with mint chutney and salad with evening tea; generally triangular in shape, it contains fine wheat flour shell stuffed with a filling of a fried mixture of mashed boiled potato, onion, green peas, spices and green chilli. The entire pastry is then deep fried to a golden brown colour, in vegetable oil.

Samsartarini: One that helps in wading through the worldly sorrow; a synonym of the Ganges.

Samudra-Mahishi: The queen of the sea; a synonym of the Ganges.

sangam: A confluence of two or more rivers or the seas; it is a sacred place for Hindus where several religious rituals are performed.

Saraswati: The goddess of learning and the arts; a river, now dry, the course of which has been traced in the Western India; a legendary river that meets the Ganges and the Yamuna at Prayag (Allahabad).

Saritamvara: A river that meets the sea; a synonym of the Ganges.

Sarva: One that is fully pure; a synonym of the Ganges.

Sarvamangala: One who blesses in every way; a synonym of goddess Lakshmi

Sarvasya sarvavyadhinam bhishakshreshthyai namo'stu te: (*Gangastuti*, 3) O best of all physicians of the diseases of all, I bow down before you.

Shailasuta: The daughter of a mountain; a synonym of the Ganges.

Shankara-mauliviharini vimale mam matirastam tava padakamal: Shankaracharya's *Shri Gangastrotam* (l. 2) O Ganges, you stay on the head of Shiva, O Ganges, you do not have any impurity, I wish to devote myself to your feet.

Shatmukhi: One that has a hundred branches; a synonym of the Ganges.

Shiva: The third deity of the sacred Hindu Trinity to whom is assigned the task of destroying or transforming the world; in the Shaiva tradition of Hinduism, Shiva is seen as the Supreme God. In the Smarta tradition, he is regarded as one of the five primary forms of God; usually worshipped in the abstract form of Shivalinga; in images, he is generally represented as immersed in deep meditation or dancing the *Tandava* upon *Apasmara Purusha* (the demon of ignorance); also considered to be the originator of music and dance.

Shivalaya: Shiva's abode; a temple dedicated to Shiva; a cemetery.

Shivoham: I'm Shiva; almighty Shiva; a phrase from Adi Shankaracharya's *Nirvanashataka* (Sextet of Salvation).

Shuddha: One that is pure; a synonym of the Ganges.

Sita: A character in the Ramayana; found in a furrow in a ploughed field; was adopted by King Janaka; wife of Ram; an ideal of Indian womanhood; a reincarnation of Lakshmi.

Sudha: An ambrosial drink of the gods that does not let them grow old or die; something that can be drunk whole heartedly for a complete well-being.

Suranadi: a river of gods; a synonym of the Ganges

Sursari: A river of gods; a synonym of the Ganges.

Swargarohanvaijayanti bhavatim bhagirathi prathaye: Valmiki's *Shri Gangashtakam* (l. 2) you are like an insignia for going to Heaven; I bow to thee.

Tarpani: Something that satisfies all; a synonym of the Ganges.

Tava tatanikate yasya nivasah khalu vaikunthe tasya nivasah: Shankaracharya's *Shri Gangastrotam* (l. 19) Those residing near your bank are just like those living in Vaikunth (Heaven)

Tejaswini: One that radiates; a synonym of the Ganges.

Thandai: A sort of cold drink prepared mainly with sweetened saffron flavoured milk and a paste of almonds, poppy seeds, aniseed, cardamom, skinned dried seeds of watermelon and cantaloupes etc. It is often mixed with 'bhang' to make an

intoxicating drink. It is traditionally prepared as an offering to Lord Shiva.

Tridhara: One that has three streams; a synonym of the Ganges.

Tripathaga: One who treads three ways; a synonym of the Ganges.

Tripurari-shirashchari papahari punatu mam.: Valmiki's *Shri Gangashtakam* (l. 26), O the dweller on the head of Lord Shiva (Tripurai) and one who destroys sins may purify me.

tvadamajjanat sajjano durjano va / vimanaih samanaih samaniyamnah: (Kalidasa's *Gangashtaka*, 3) Being brought with honour by the aeroplanes, comes to the abode of Shiva;

Tvamapita pitambarapuranasam vitarasi: One who drinks your water gets an abode in Heaven.

Vairagya: Detachment; absence of worldly desires and passions; indifference to the world; asceticism.

Valmiki's Ashram: The hermitage of Sage Valmiki; Sita stayed there after Ram banished her and gave birth to her twins Luv and Kush.

Varanasi: Another name for Kashi/ Banaras; one of world's oldest living cities situated on the confluence of Varuna and Assi rivers; according to a legend, the city was founded by lord Shiva; the centre of the earth in *Hindu Cosmology*; the religious and cultural capital of India; regarded as holy by Hindus, Buddhists and Jains; every devout Hindu hopes to visit the city at least once in a lifetime, take a holy dip at the famous *ghats* of the Ganga, walk the pious *Panchakosi* road that bounds the city, and, if God wills, die here in old age; dying in Kashi is equivalent to dying at the feet of the Almighty. Raja Rao in his *On the Ganga Ghat* writes: "Virtue does not grow easily in Benares. And vice has no better place. For all come here to burn."

Vimalodaka: A river having clear water; a synonym of the Ganges.

Vipasha: One that removes all bondages; a synonym of the Ganges.

Vishnōh *sangatikarini* *Hara-jatajutatavicharini*: (Kalidasa's *Gangashtaka Stotra*, 6) One who lives in the company of Lord Vishnu, one who moves within the netted locks of Lord Shiva;
Vishnu: Something that is prevalent everywhere; second deity among the sacred Hindu Trinity; has the duty of preserving the world; rests in the sea of milk on the coils of Sheshnaga.
Vishnupadi: Emanating from the Lotus feet of Supreme Lord Sri Vishnu; a synonym of the Ganges.
yajña: To make a sacrifice; they have several types; every *brahmin* is supposed to perform five types of *yajñas* viz. *Bhut Yajña*, *Manushya Yajña*, *Pitra Yajña*, *Dev Yajña*, and *Brahma Yajña* daily. *Havan* is one of the processes of the ritual of *Yajña*.
Yaksha: The name of a broad class of nature-spirits, usually benevolent, who are caretakers of the natural treasures hidden in the earth and tree roots. The feminine form of the word is *yakṣī* or *yakshini*. In Kalidasa's *Meghadūta*, the *yakṣa* narrator is a romantic figure, pining with love for his missing beloved. In the didactic Hindu dialogue of the *Yakṣaprasnāḥ* (A riddle wrapped in enigma put by *Yakṣa*); only *Yudishthira* was able to answer them satisfactorily.
Yama: The god of death; self-control; a great moral and religious duty.
Yogeesh: The chief of Yogis; a synonym of Lord Shiva

Afterwords

I

Ann Rogers*



This book of 52 poems covers a wide range of subjects, serious and light hearted. Others are cultural, emotional, social and topical. The text clearly displays the sensitivity of the author as a poet and his enjoyment of the art of poetry. The author takes the readers on a journey and delights them with his ability to put into words and verse, the fruits of his imagination. Certainly these poems achieve that goal. Equally they set out to show the readers his affiliation to his homeland with such poems as 'Ganga Mata - A Prayer' where great homage is paid to the famous water body. The poem 'Vicious Circle' refers to an Uncle gone to war. The first line asks of the reader "Why did my Uncle go to Basra?" The reader is compelled to find out more. Each poem is a story and one is left in no doubt as to its meaning. Perhaps individual poems will mean different things to different readers but they display without doubt, the huge ability of the author and a splendid imagination/patient pen that has so adequately created this delightful collection of verses. Whatever message the author wished to send in the writing of this book, has more than likely been delivered. The titles are mostly simple and often consist of only one word. They are usually always relevant to the content.

The poems themselves on occasion change in rhyme, scheme or meter but this does not detract from their flow. There are no redundant words. Where similes have been used they have been used in a sensible way and remain relevant to the verse. The shorter poems also show good strong structure and are able to deliver their message swiftly, with timing like that of a good orator on stage. The poem 'Reasons' in eight short lines, starts, delivers and concludes leaving the reader with the image of a would be, corresponding duo. It shall not be out of place to quote it in full:

Since I can't speak to you
I'm scribbling these lines.
Since I can't read them to you
I'm printing them.
Since I can't see you touch them
I'm leaving them to posterity.
Since I can't deliver them to you
I'm posting them on the web.

The author displays a sympathetic understanding of sensitive matters such as grief, poverty and struggle and certainly a good social awareness. In particular this is portrayed in the poem entitled 'Poverty: Some Scenes' in which the writer depicts feeding the hungry by distributing fruits - the police driving the people away so that poverty would become invisible. The author has been able to deliver a very clear message with a few well chosen words. Poetry as an art form creates visual images. The descriptions within are full of clarity without seeming as if they are descriptions at all. They paint pleasure to the senses. However, the words are ample and descriptive enough to entertain in written form. If one did not have a good visual imagination, the written word would certainly be adequate. The verses definitely create emotion within the reader. Some happy, some sad and nearly all reflect a mood of one sort or another. Many are written in questioning tone. Some are obvious and others have

more underlying text that causes deep thinking. Several follow a topical theme and others give an insight into a strong bond with India as well as affording an enjoyable cultural journey to some very specific places. The poem 'Saviour' puts reality into a mythical situation in a very clever way. "Suddenly I entered a cloud, my joy knew no bounds" - the reader now wishes to go there to see if he too can experience that joy. The Poem 'Granny' talks with affection of an ancestral home in need of repair and of Granny now unable to carry out these repairs herself. So many of the readers can identify with the beautiful words. It is picturesque, effective in its delivery and in a way, quite sad emotively. It is a stunning contribution to the book.

The poems appear to have been written on occasion following an event in life and others possibly created after personal experience has given need for them to be written. An enjoyment of family life seems evident from the writings. A lovely poem called 'Inquisitiveness' paints a wonderful family scene to the extent where one can visualize the young child swaying in silence. The passion of the author when writing about his homeland is clear. It evokes comfort in the reader as the emotions are conveyed through his words. Possibly family, close friends and students would be the audience for this book before its world-wide publication. Certainly this book would offer something to them all. It would undoubtedly meet with their expectations. For those of the readers unfamiliar with the Indian language, Sanskrit, a poem that includes words unknown to them, may lose some of its glory. Equally, in translation it may lose something vital. For example, if this is to reach a wider audience, "Swargarohanvairajanti bhavati bhagirathi prathaye" or "Gangam vari manohari murari-charanachyutam / Tripurari-shirashchhari papahari punatu mam." would make very difficult reading for many and therefore a detailed 'Glossary' is justified.

The punctuation and grammar in the book are good. It is however unusual to see a sentence starting with 'And' or 'But'; even more so when followed by a comma. This is not to say that it is wrong but that it is generally not acceptable. It is a style the author has adopted and it seems to work. One may cite 'Gopalpur on Sea' as an example with sentences like "But who can touch the moon", "And, the beach reels", "But, the black smoke from scooters, motorbikes", "And their canoes and their motorboats take rest". Similarly in 'For a Bride who Thinks of Suicide' there is an example: "But to be embalmed with care".

Poetry is intended to be how it is as written by the author. Like painted art there is nothing to say what is right and what is wrong. I am unable to suggest any areas for improvement so maybe this writing is not helpful. It is intended to give an idea however, of what the reader may gain from the poems and the observations and interpretations of one individual reader. Verses are believable and well written. They make the reader contemplate and desire to read them again. They create the mind of the reader, images not originally there.

The layout of the poems are well organised within the book. The book works because there is a variety of solid subject matter and an excellent flow to the writing along with such great ability and an evident commitment, dedication and passion by the author. It is well balanced because of the variation of content and time scale. It is good to see reference to current issues as well as more traditional ones. In conclusion, a beautiful book of well written verses that encompasses many topics, to which readers from varied background may all relate.

***Ann Rogers** was raised in the Middle England but currently lives in the South West. She has worked for many years for British Ceramic

Manufacturers Federation in the Potteries. She keeps herself busy by looking after her family, undertaking tours, reading poetry and recording events in photographs.

II

Barbara Wühr*



My friend of "The School of Poetry", Susheel Kumar Sharma, has asked me to do a sort of critique of his second collection of poems *The Door is Half-Open*. Before I undertake to do one in prose, here is my comment in form of a poem on one of his poems, 'Passing By':

So entering, tiptoeing, what do I find?
A poem called "Passing By". Never mind!
It is the Poets right to yearn and howl,
Sunbeams attacking his body and his soul!
The grey hair not turning black,
The hopes being drowned just for lack
Of being loved with his whole body and mind,
Of those things he cannot possess or cannot find.
Religions telling us that we must not desire,
All our dreams finishing in hell and fire;
Mankind is obliged to live in jealousy and fear,
Not being happy just Now and Here.
I am preaching the liberty to love and share,
Not to restrain others to be your slave and care
That, as long as poets and other artists make us dream,
Let's rejoice and be reinvigorated by the sunshine beam!

May I also point out at the outset that the English language is not the language I am used to; I prefer German (my native language) or French (living in this nice country for more than 50 years). Still I have to comply with the wish of Susheel Kumar Sharma for the comments on *The Door is Half Open*. He was perhaps impressed by my comments on some of his poems that he published in "The School of Poetry". I feel honoured but am also anxious about this "challenge", as I am not used to this sort of "exercise". Since I consider the poets of "The School of Poetry" as my friends, I decided to put in my best in order to give my point of view concerning the universal language of poetry "as a modern European woman". Also because Susheel being a great poet, with his soul and roots in India, where spirituality can still be seen in many places, parts and activities, has touched my heart. I am sure *The Door is Half Open* will do as well to those who will read this book.

The first poem in the collection is 'Ganga Mata: A Prayer'. How can I allow myself to interfere and to write something concerning this prayer, India being a country with a long spiritual life? My opinion is more or less that of a "free woman", defending the right for woman to decide what is important for her and on my behalf; I do not believe that I am go(o)d nor (d)evil, I am just a human being, trying to be happy. When I meditate, it is not out of frustration but only to find my inner core; and there is plenty of love to share. I shall certainly not speak of the form of this poem, which is great, not of all the Indian names (I do not understand). I shall, therefore, try to speak of the "heart" of your prayer. All the desires you tell the Ganges, giving it the names of different Deities (I have been brought up in a Christian (Luther; Protestant) spirituality in Germany) have nothing extraordinary for me, even if it does not correspond to the Christian education I received. In fact, twenty years ago my sister came back from a visit to America and she told me about shamanism of Indian tribes (she had lived with the family of one of them). Afterwards she met in Germany STARHAWK and

she defended a woman's liberty. This was an impulse for changing my personal development. But nowadays I believe in our androgynous nature and extol "balance" between men and woman. Human beings always long for something looking like "liberty". You similarly write: "singing like a bird ... playing in the waters"... etc.

Contemplation is part of all the religions and spiritual plans. Of course, I agree when you complain against the way everything is changing and not for the betterment of humanity most of time. The industrial power of these hundred last years with all the scientific inventions does not give us the time to become used to it and we are not sure what will come out of all these changes. People all over the world, in general, do not want to bombard this world with poison but want to expand the universe and to explore brotherhood. Or could it be that mankind has changed to the point of no return? What for is life with all you have learned, if it does not grant you something in return? Yes we are living in a world of chaos nowadays and all those changes make us cry to heaven and ask for protection! All this is very easy to understand in the whole world and by every nation. I believe it is not important to pray to only one god or one "power" in the form of many gods. The fact is that we must look into our heart and find an answer to all these fears, pretending that life owes something to us. We have to adapt to all the changes; and only our way of perceiving these changes makes the difference. We have enough treasures in our heart, so much LOVE, that we can still believe in brotherhood I think, LOVE and LIGHT, here and now, to everyone!

I shall not say very much about the second poem 'Spineless-II'. The reader has to search by him/herself. Nothing seems to be on the right place in this consciousness; but in fact it is! Living in a world of duality, we have to face the fact, that nothing is perfect. With a little smile I must admit that this poem IS PERFECT! As an old lady I feel the humorous note in the poem 'Crisis'. No

“pentagon” to protect you, dear poet, no more “perfection” of how important we are! Let us drop our masks! This poem has no limits; no frontier-guards. Dreams are rising to the skies, like the illusion of reality. What can we do? What a nice idea (for a woman) to use “peeling sand” (in ‘Shattered Dreams’)! You are comparing this action to the difficult task for Bush collecting evidences against Saddam and at the end Saddam was hanged! Nothing is eternal here on Mother Earth. I very much like the image of the weaver in this poem, making me think of the spider woman. Everything with a “special power” is appealing in our subconscious to the energy, the light of illumination. The cosmos is the most wonderful dream existing; but I am awaiting the revelation about the dreams, the poet will reveal at a proper time. Am I one of the proper preceptors? The poem ‘Routine’ is a nice story about routine. Something we are doing very often, without realizing that we are doing it (as we are used to it) and we are not living anymore “here and now”. Is it really important to be at a special place at an exact hour? Oh I must admit that in this world we have to obey the rules, and punctuality is necessary for the world of business and other obligations. So people in many places of the world are actually waiting for the bus or the train; and just waiting is really awful, especially if something does not turn round as expected. But as has been pointed out in this poem, the persona had just superannuated the day but was still waiting for being picked up in the official car. Sometimes this change makes the difference for a short moment, in a day like so many others. If I understand the next poem ‘Dilemma’ right, life for the poet’s parents was not easy. If you ask me, dear poet, everybody can hold his head high, poor or rich; it is how one feels about it. There are people who make the choice to be poor, like the Buddha! Your father was a rich man all his life, having a son like yourself.

Dear Susheel I agree with you that wars are awful and I believe only made for those who want the “power” and they keep on telling and spreading lies about other nations. I agree soldiers, just

numbers, die for ideologies they are brought up without having enough experience to decide for themselves. And of course, they cannot choose. The government in place being supported by the army and the police does not allow any rebellion. I was born in Germany in 1939 at the beginning of the last world war, you are speaking of in your ‘Vicious Circle’. I spent nearly all the time of this awful period with my grandmother and my sister in the mountains of Austria; my mother and my father (who was not a soldier but working for the army in a factory in the RUHR as engineer) had to stay in one of the most industrial parts of Germany; so my life began without my parents and I had always the feeling of being abandoned. But the most terrible day was the day I started my job in Paris in June 1959 (I was 20 years old then). It was in a Jewish Firm. One of my colleagues (a catholic one) told me about what had happened in prisons (camps de concentration) in Germany during the War.

Believe me that it was the first time I heard of it! This traumatism is still very difficult to deal with. Wars are certainly not the solution. How many people all over the world are mourning, are crying and will never forget their loss in the wars! As long as a poet like you is writing about somebody, you’ll set forth his life in some way. Of course in our heart we will always cherish those who are dead. But life must go on! I wonder at the title of the next poem ‘One Step Together’. And of course, the reason must be the impression we have, getting older, that life was just a short journey. Fear is the most awful feeling, because it is the contrary of love and it is not important if we do not dare travel anymore; if we want to live until the end, we must participate in just the moment we are aware of our existence, with all the joy and love we have since the beginning and until the end. I often thought about the sense of the greetings and especially about the short answers, like: ‘You are welcome!’ For this reason I adore the next poem ‘Camouflage’ behind the curtains of your bed!

What can I say Dear Poet of your next poem 'Grief' where you draw an image of your dark soul with the keyboard of your computer on the screen? Just another picture for the loneliness, extolling all the grievances of a life, mankind does not dare living. The tide of human affairs is just the mirror of their personality. What are 'Strings' if not yearning... waiting for the fire of creativity; this empty feeling is a part of our human nature and very often we blame fate for those moments. I have learned the time going by, that those moments of searching are the moments necessary for a new beginning and your poem, Dear Friend, touches my heart as you are always ready to help others to be happy. Concerning your poem 'Dwellings', I must admit that I have another approach to life. Of course what you suggest in the poem is a possibility to live; but I prefer the extremes -- accepting what I am -- expecting from the eternal changes that those days where I can share something with others, I am really happy. That does not mean, earning much money. That means understanding, compassion and giving all the love in my heart. Concerning this poem I can only say that the words you choose, Dear Poet, are fabulous. I know a little bit about *Samsara*, nevertheless I feel free and happy creating my life in a new way every day. If this life is only an illusion, at least I had a nice dream, for some time!

Oh... religions... deep in one's inner core, the dragon lies... but why do they consider the dark side of one's being as something abnormal? It is part of one's selves like Indian gods have both sides: good and evil. Therefore, I cannot agree with this kind of contrition in 'Meditation'. I consider 'Across the Lethe' as a love-poem. I go to the two last lines again and again: "And be lost for ever/ Beyond the recognisable." On the other hand I can tell you, that as a protestant I was not used to have ritual objects in my house (in church there is only the cross and no saints) but nowadays there are paintings, objects, souvenirs and photos of my family everywhere in my home.

There are even stuffed animals! As a matter of fact, reading books concerning rituals, I learned why it is so important to humans to cling to something, and that what we are thinking is transformed into energy, and energy is what makes our universe. Those we love will always be present anyway.

What does my poet-friend say about 'Inquisitiveness'? I am not really of his opinion: "The question wasn't innocent." Children question us and that is their right. It is also true that we can tell them a story, as my parents did, when I was just a little child. (In Germany babies are brought by the 'Klapperstorch', the 'stork'; in France babies are born in a 'choux' in a 'cabbage'). Why not tell them the truth in words they can understand? That way at least we shall not be abusing their confidence; and as everything is new to them, there is no judgement, only the parents have their idea of good or evil and influence their children. Of course there must be rules and with love and understanding, we raise up our children the best we can and education is very important to boys well as to girls. This poem is followed by 'Tiny Tot'. Yes, it is nice to be a tiny tot where there is a mother loving her children, and something to eat and to drink and to sleep on. The world for them is a big playground, just as for tiny animals. I cannot but help smiling reading such an intricate situation as in 'Handcuffed' and the 'outcome' with the biscuits (very British ... some tea and biscuits) might help! I truly appreciate 'In the Lap of Nature' as I am a romantic woman, and the man, capable of weaving his dreams around me in this way, is touching my soul somewhere between the earth and skies in the space between two stars.

'Vanity' - wow...! It is a poem depicting very well the difficulties one has to endure before leaving the earth when growing old (something not easy to be accepted!). Yes, some of the signs of great age have already started appearing in me at the age of 70 and I can understand very well the person dreaming to become stronger every day. Reasons needs to be specified why a need for

communication is there. Only human beings have a wish to communicate with those who are not with them. The persona in 'Reasons' needs to communicate with the people around the globe -- the people who are far and wide. So what means need to be used? Why not look for the media we have now in our possession. Yes, every mood can be shared with many in an instant! 'Saviour' is not as easy to understand as it seems at the first sight! I had to look twice into it to grapple with it. Everything is alright in one's dream; one is happy being on the top. Perhaps I am wrong, but the eagle is such a great symbol (Yang/ the Sun) that the fact it has been thrown down to earth by "someone else", as you were flying high...makes me hesitate. Of course the eagle is Yin/Yang, the north and the south, the cold and the hot etc. -- 'duality'! Are you afraid once more of the dark side in yourself, Dear Poet?

Oh dear me, an awful picture of poverty all over the world has been painted in 'Poverty: Some Scenes' (eight to be precise)! It is so true that those images are nearly insupportable. There are many countries, my friends told me, for the tourists which hide the poverty of their country, by not allowing the visits to slums there. I do not have a solution to the problem. Perhaps it could be possible in some countries, as in Africa, to help them and teach them how to irrigate their fields. They are responsible for themselves. Education is very important too, as well as preparing the future the best we can by always performing one's duty! The poet continues to describe the awful conditions in India in 'At the Hospital'; I say to myself: "What a pity!" I admire the doctors doing their job under such awful conditions, as well as the personnel helping at their best. Memories are made of the stuff like a picture we are finding somewhere as well as our old beds which have seen so many different situations, good and bad ones. Memories of our first years of marriage, the joy and sorrow we experienced, the children making us laugh or cry... But then life sometimes has other plans for us; the events like separation

or death. Like on the stage: life must go on! I agree, therefore, with you poet about 'Memories'. Always confronting us with our fears, the poet made a poem, called 'A Racist Attack': "The road to crazy weapons..../ Meeting unknown denizens...." And the fear of the UNKNOWN! What about "Mangoes"? India has so many interesting rituals! An exotic fruit, as we say here and it is interesting all we can make with it. I use it sometimes for a special meal and I am happy to learn a little bit more of the Mango tree; in fact, I never asked me earlier what about Mangoes; and this poem explains what an important tree it is for the Indians. Just wonderful! 'Struggle' beyond all questions is a poem about death; it reveals the nature of our destiny on earth. What is death? Young or old bones "are made of dust" and must return to dust; flesh is weak but pure emotions as kindness and pity are raising mankind to spiritual heights as the smoke is rising to the sky while a dead body is being burnt. I myself told my family that I wanted to be incinerated after my death; thus, returning to Mother Earth for a new cycle. 'Agony' describes the "agony of a poet" searching for words; he has not fallen on a sterile ground. So much sorrow to describe; so many wishes not fulfilled. We have to face it. People have always used subterfuge in order to be someone or something else as has been described in 'Masquerade'. But in love-affairs, I agree, we better resemble ourselves. Sunday on the calendar... and a sunny day in the heart... when there is someone to cherish, or better sharing your love; no special day is needed to share a relationship ('Relationships on a Holiday'). On the other hand, for Christians, Sunday, the seventh day is made for relaxing... I laugh out loud (LOL)... Nobody can, or let us say only a few... We are all too busy!

As so often in my life, when I am confronted with a special situation, synchronism is showing up. My problem today was the poem 'From Left to Right' that has so many issues related to India: "This city is no more sleepy and sleazy but keeps you on your toes."

But today, at 12H30 PM, I went into my kitchen, and put on the TV just broadcasting a document concerning India. My “angels” gave me a look into your life. They spoke of your “city” and other towns where people are burnt and where they are bathing etc in the holy river Ganges. So much and intense beliefs are something which cannot leave me insensible, even if the fact that the waters are not anymore “pure”, is quite disconcerting for me, having been brought up with strict prescriptions of hygiene. But all these people seemed to be or very religious, or really respectful and loving. As to your poem, ‘From Left to Right’, it seems that they are like “everywhere” talking about “better times”! ‘Swan Song’ is really a nice poem. The aeroplane you were developing, belongs to the swan (symbol of the sun/the light); the masculine side (science also belongs to the YANG, the impulse of creation); and you were made for the Yin qualities of the Swan, the feminine part, made of dreams, patience and compassion! It has also to do something with the dark side of life as you rightly point out; your poems are made for those who have nothing else! Most definitely, Susheel’s poems, are made for all those who like poetry.

The poem ‘Mirage’ makes me think of Aldous Huxley’s *Brave New World*. Is life just a dream? Of course going to the moon (to heaven) would be nice for those who believe that there will be no sorrow anymore, but I’m forewarned: “Accidental and medical insurances are free/ To all the travellers; your families won’t suffer.” Ha, that’s what is so “special” about this voyage in India. But for those of no fixed abode the moon is still a “harbour of peace”, as we say in France. In ‘Nithari and Beyond’ Susheel is appealing to the spirits of nature, and telling them about the awful behaviour of his human sisters and brothers. As long as the poor have no other choice to avoid having so many children they cannot feed, there will be women being obliged to abort a female foetus. All the horror of mutilated organs, etc. has something to do with desperate humanity.

When there is no more respect of life or of the official institutions, it’s a period of chaos and suffering, the end and the beginning of a new cycle.

What about ‘Gifts’? There are always two sides considering life: those which are considered as something to be ashamed of and others we can be proud of! The beginning of life is something amazing and as long as the grain is becoming a field nurturing the hungry hope will not fade. ‘For a Bride Who Thinks of Suicide’ is another wonderful poem of my friend, about the nonsense of a young bride thinking of suicide, as some young men are doing. He is worshipping, idealizing the young woman and tells us:

She is the song of a young heart,
Full of sound and music
Signifying harmony.

Susheel is right in saying, “Brides are the carriers of tradition”; this is so even in Europe!

With reference to Susheel’s ‘A Poem for my Country’ I submit that there can be mother- or father-countries; May I refer to a mother country, i.e. the place of one’s birth, the place of origin! In Germany we say “Vaterland” (fatherland). “Because of the use of Vaterland in German war propaganda, the term “Fatherland” in English has become associated with domestic British and American anti-Nazi propaganda during World War II. The French commonly refer to France as ‘la mère Patrie’ and are ready to die for her. Hindi, Maithili, Bhojpuri, Nepali, Marathi and Sanskrit have *mātrubhūmi*, literally ‘Mother-Earth’. Life in co-existence in Indian towns is such a dilemma, because there is no work for everybody. Too many people come from the countryside to the towns hoping to find a job! And in Europe, there are now more people confronted with the same drama! Humanity should not accept the richest becoming more rich and the poorest more poor. Why can’t we find the balance between

the rich and the poor and everybody being involved in the progress and the welfare of this planet?

‘Gopalpur on Sea’ is a poetic description of this town in Orissa (India) and the seaside with its roaring and attacking the shore. I can see, hear and smell this town and its habitants as Susheel depicts it. Here in France, there are no temples like yours directly on the seaside, and the poverty is not as visible, but the smell of “sweet-meat shops” etc. is the same; the black smoke of cars has diminished, with all the new cars. Only the noise is still there, especially in summer time, when tourists invade the seaside. I have always liked the sight of the sea, and I live not far away from the Mediterranean Sea. Here near Montpellier there are no mountains, but going a bit farther, the landscape changes and it is still more amazing to look unto the force of the sea hurting the borderline! As to this poem, the last three lines of the last stanza remind me of the fascination of this element!

I agree with Susheel’s feeling: “To tear apart the similes and metaphors/ the poem remains incomplete.” (‘Rivers’) This river’s like a mother, laying her arms around the earth - a hypo sucking milk from her breasts. But as everything on this material world, there is also the “awful side” of the “River” (crocodiles drag other animals into the waters and eat them); Life and Death are part of creation and this fact, Susheel has related with great skill. ‘Yama’ – the next poem is a sort of prayer to the God of Death (Yama). It represents the call of the ripples and in the heart of the old man, feeling himself lonely even in the crowd imploring the deity to fulfil his demand and as in so many dreams “dolphins coming to take him ashore”. Just the wish to be released of life in the present form is a good piece of writing. I being a ‘believer’ am touched in my heart by the poem ‘Heavenly Love’. Yes God puts love in the core of everybody and everything in and on Mother Earth. So let us be happy, knowing that we belong to ‘Him’ and our road is always leading us back to our

origin. The next poem ‘O, Beloved’ also speaks of love and conveys a very important message. Real love is that sort of love supporting all the changes time produces. Love will never fade, because even those who left us will still be in our loving heart and we’ll cherish and remember our ancestors and the friends we lost, as long as we are alive.

Susheel ponders over the philosophy of democracy in his ‘Democracy: Old and New’. The human rights here in France, since the “revolution”, are the “banner” of democracy but there have always been those who are poor, those who do not find a job to earn some money, or get a temporary job they are not used to. Everything is constantly changing, and those who are at the top fiercely take advantage of their situation. When will there be a world where everybody can live with dignity? Democracy is just an attempt to make rules of Society “acceptable”. So let it be; only revolutions or a big cataclysm could change something.

So many men (some women too) use their superiority to spoil their relationships; but a great wish has been put into form of a poem (‘A Wish’) by my friend Susheel. Let me quote some of his lines hereunder:

Think of the moments
That enraged me
And I lost control of my
Usual self...”
A wish: “Let your days with
Those around be
Peaceful, harmonious and soothing!
Think of me.

Not accepting those moments of losing control and taking advantage of the superiority (speaking of my ex husband)... even if it was out of anxiety... I chose living alone five years ago, divorcing for the

second time after 30 years of marriage (“by common consent”, as we say in France. I only agree with the wish to live peacefully and harmoniously, conforming to my spiritual beliefs (going forwards and creating my life every day, every moment, in love and understanding) and I am doing quite well nowadays, sharing with new friends and the rest of my family! I laugh out loud while reading Susheel’s ‘Bludgeoning of Chance’. I know Susheel you are a ‘saint’, you’ll never do something like coveting the neighbour’s wife. Yes, you are, we are and I am....

Am I the master of my actions
Am I the master of my fate
Am I the master of my sins?

Let me assure you that high age does not end the questions about the goals of life and death.

I love the next poem ‘Granny’. She appears to be a ‘lady’ who thought that she must leave something like her house to her grandchild. She loved her descendants and especially you (the narrator), representing the future. Of course, old houses are expensive, as there are many things, and not only stones, that must be changed and time going by, the situations of everybody is changing. The poet is living in a world of dreams, creating his universe with his mind and as the world is changing without respite, every generation must find its proper truth. But everybody must agree that there are so many dreams, another reality, connecting us to our roots.

‘Colours’ is a poem in two sections. The first section is a nice poem about another pattern of life: the season of the harvest finished, the leaves being dropped to earth, the gardener burning them and the wind making dance these leaves for the last time. A wonderful description! The second section of the poem uses the symbol of butterflies. It represents the “soul” flying to heaven - just beautiful with plenty of striking colours, drunken by the nectar of the flowers

in the sunlight. Yes this idea of Adam and Eve in Paradise, before they eat the apple, is the dream of perfection but what about the end of the butterfly? Everywhere we look, there are the eternal changes between joy and sorrow, between life and death. The only thing we can do is to look for balance. Writing his poems Susheel leaves a trail like a comet and perhaps like “Halley’ comet” he is coming back with a new book of revelations.

The poet tells gives us the image of multi-coloured patterns in his ‘Contemplation’, a poem in two sections. The poem has something to do with the dark side too; the moon is the YIN/ the female. The poet describes many situations to showcase our lives when the night is surrounding us. But here I understand the poet is speaking of himself. The poet lives in a utopia where his family is doing everything, cajoling him, just to go on, earning the money to sustain them. Of course, this is the way many of us live but the pressure of those who depend on others, is always difficult for both sides.

The next poem ‘Purgation’ is in five sections; the poem reiterates my belief that the eternal fire is within our-selves. In the first section, the poet puts the persona into deeper crevices against the nocturnal depths in order to support the difficulties of life instead of accepting the dark side of his self. This item is of very great importance, because it has something to do with forgiving. The hell lies within us as long as we do not forgive ourselves. It is a personal challenge; all the sorrow concerning one’s mistakes is just an experience God puts on one’s way, in order to forgive oneself. All of us are co-creators of the universe, doing the best we can. All the negative thoughts are the real purgatory here on the earth; everything existing on this level of consciousness exists at the same time on other levels. That’s the realm of the fallen angel Lucifer, as we say. The second section of the poem illustrates the process of purgation through the metaphor of the cigar. It is just another proof concerning

our addictions; the fact that it is difficult to learn what is good for us. The third section of the poem deals with an awful memory and an introspection and to feel miserable about one's life; yes it is the punishment for those who do not recognize the perfection of the creation. The fourth section of the poem talks about those people for whom world is filled with plenty of dreams, of joy but on the other hand, there is all the misery of all the poor and ill people. Is that "purgation" they choose when reincarnation? I don't know. The poet also simply raises a question but does not answer it. The fifth section of the poem talks about the properties of fire which is one of the elements, creating and destroying the material worlds; the power of Brahma is revealed when nothing remains. With the burning of sins only a pure being remains - the purpose of purgatory is done. There will always be the energy of God - the never ending source of our souls from whom all of us emanate.

The next poem 'Hope is the Last Thing to be Lost' has six sections. I completely agree that in this world of duality, men balance between hopelessness and hopefulness. What one should aim at is a 'balance'! But going on our road looking forward with hope is the real challenge. The first section of this poem is very modern and like *Alice in Wonderland*; the situation is strange as dreams often are, leaving an impression of discomfort and questioning. Finding an order in disorder is the wish of those human beings who are praying and asking the Lord; many souls have burnt themselves in the process. This statement is true for everybody who believes that renunciation can help saving their souls. But as the poet presumes, there are too many people who prefer to take advantage of their neighbour instead of praying, but war may destroy humanity; only some seed or plants would probably be saved. The choice is still ours but will the words of those who pray be able to turn the scale? Searching the way out of this world of duality is not easy; in India, however, there was a man with an enormous influence, a sage,

known nowadays a Buddha. I very much appreciate the novel *Siddhartha* (inspired by the life of the Buddha) of Hermann Hesse, a friend of my uncle; both of them lived in Switzerland towards the end of their life. Enlightenment is a way, being free to choose: asceticism or materialism sets one's mind at ease. At the end of life, just meditating ("By watching the breath/ Going in and going out/One can know", as says Susheel in the III section of the poem) one can find one's peace of mind ("the garden/Among the rocks", *Ibid*)! As said above, these verses about meditation are great! I myself have been practising meditation but have not yet achieved a complete rest of my mind; I just let pass by all my thoughts, breathing calmly. I agree, with dear friend, all our physical or psychological problems, all the bad news of this world the poet has enumerated and the fears they are giving rise to, can be abolished by meditation. Buddhism is practiced in Europe by many people looking for an alternative to the established religions. The fifth section of the poem, I think, is a nice dream: no more fears, love is spread all over the world. And last but not the least, the sixth section concerning hope continues as long as "the busy bee [continues storing] honey" despite human plunder and the monk, as well as his disciples, sit patiently on the Ganga Ghat, trying to get peace within; in order to change the world. These and other metaphors give sense to this poem of Susheel Kumar Sharma. The most important new paradigm is expressed in these lines:

Hope gives me courage
To enter the gates of Heaven
Where I have to face God
To accept my retribution.
Hope gives courage to us to get rid of our pain.

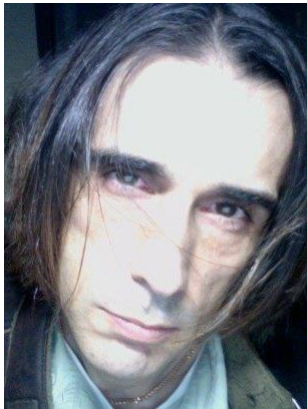
Not being used to the culture of India, and not knowing the meaning of 'Varanasi' I searched on Google to understand the meaning of Susheel's poem 'Liberation at Varanasi' and now I know

that you are speaking of the town of Banaras, Dear Poet. I saw at television two days ago this town and the amazing spiritual life around the Ganges; I saw the Sadhus, some of them being unclothed and their body white with the ashes of burnt corpses, meditating in order to stop reincarnation, living as hermits. This poem very well describes the feeling of pilgrims from across the country, praying to Lord Shiva to whom this City is dedicated.

***Barbara Wühr**, Retired Secretary, (b. in Germany in 1939), has been living in Montpellier (France) since 1959. She is a member of “The School of Poetry” on Facebook. Nowadays she is busy in writing her first book titled *Ma Voie, ou comment renaître de ses cendres...*. She claims: “In this book I am telling nearly everything about my life... and I do not know if it will be published one day... but I love writing... and I added poems and photos of my paintings too... because these paintings are part of ‘my therapy’ - and I found balance, living here and now...”

III

Gavriel Navarro*



It takes a certain talent to create poetic verse that truly evokes an image of reality and that is what Susheel has done with this wonderful collection of works. Each poem is demonstrative of an ability to pull imagery and feeling together and weave them into carefully chosen words. I especially enjoyed “In the Lap of Nature” as it brought to mind the relaxed sensation of my favourite places and the peace of mind one feels in the presence of nature and how troubles go down the

drain along with every bit of it.

This wonderful collection of works covers many topics and is aptly named. I find it fascinating also how this work can transport the reader from the daily questions of life itself, and drawn you into a journey of carefully selected places that rise more questions in every read.

This book contains all the elements we have come to expect from Susheel as a poet: Complete command of language, engaging wit, breadth of detail and scope, touching familiarity. Susheel keeps alive the living word, the poem and this book is a wealth of material and a treasury of the spoken word that represents a necessity.

***Gavriel Navarro** (b. 1967) from Caracas (Venezuela) lives in Yokohama-shi, Kanagawa, Japan. He is a bilingual poet (Author of *The Wind and the Sea* and *Poems and Reflections on a Voyage of No Return*) and a musician; runs ‘School of Poetry’.

IV

H C Gupta*



The poems in the collection mostly confessional, autobiographical, devotional - are a well-calculated conscious flow of ideas; the poems fail to evoke emotions even in poems predominantly, *prima facie*, must evoke them because - at least, it appears to me - they have not touched the heart and emotions to the core.

The matter of the poems consists largely of places visited and scenes portrayed and as such the images are profusely graphic and concrete. The first poem, ‘Ganga Mata - A Prayer’, the longest of the lot, is not every reader’s cup of tea because of the Sanskrit Shlokas and allusions and references to

obscure persons, gods, goddesses and places. It needs a glossary. The very titles - 'In the Lap of Nature', 'Mangoes', 'Rivers', 'Nithari and Beyond', 'Gopalpur on Sea' and 'Granny' - quite familiar to the poet (and allusions to places in 'Ganga Mata- A Prayer') are little known to the readers. Many of the topics - (I have used the term intentionally) 'Grief', 'Meditation', 'Across the Lethe', 'Inquisitiveness', 'Vanity', 'Struggle', 'Agony', 'Camouflage', 'Masquerade', 'Mirage', 'Gifts', 'Yama', 'Dwellings', 'Reasons', 'Tiny Tot', 'Heavenly Love', 'Liberation at Varanasi', 'Democracy: Old and New', 'For a Bride Who Thinks of Suicide' and 'A Poem for My Country' are discursive and read like discourses and belong to the category of biographical, descriptive, narrative or reflective compositions in verse. And the personal poems - 'Crisis', 'Shattered Dreams', 'Routine', 'Dilemma', 'Vicious Circle', 'One Step Together', 'Grief', 'Handcuffed', 'Strings', 'Poverty: Some Scenes', 'At the Hospital', 'Memories', 'Relationships on a Holiday', 'From Left to Right', 'Swan Song', 'O Beloved', 'A Wish', 'Bludgeoning of Chance' and 'Granny', do ring the bell but do not make resonances. That is to say they do not leave the reader in that frame of mind which Wordsworth's 'The Solitary Reaper' does: "The music in my heart I bore/ Long after it was heard no more."

All this comes to this: the subject-matter of the poems appeals more to head than to heart. The poems are fully mature deliveries and will serve the purpose of showcasing the contemporary poetry in Indian English - a type in itself. The poet has dealt with his thoughts conceived in the busy schedule of routine meticulously. As a result, therefore, he has revealed his potential for public exposure. The poems are to the point, neat and clean; and excepting the allusions, they are brief and easy to comprehend and analyse.

***H C Gupta** is a critic, translator, book-reviewer and poet. He has several publications to his credit. He retired as Professor & Head, PG

& Research Dept of English, K R G Autonomous College (Jiwaji University), Gwalior.

V

Kenneth Lumpkin*



It is hard enough to write good, honest poetry in one's own language, let alone in a foreign one. Of the rather large wave of Indian born, English language writers/poets, Susheel Kumar Sharma has shown himself once again, as someone who 'gets it'. In his first collection "From the Core Within" Mr. Sharma took the reader on a journey into his own psyche, which is a place one would imagine and expect a poet to dwell. In this second collection, he has guided us again into the personal made universal, and at the same time managed to blend his native Hindu culture with his newer Anglo one. This is hard to pull off while not sounding pedantic or forced as Pound did with his Latin, Greek and Chinese, (none of which he was fluent in) sprinkled here and there throughout his work. Such linguistic references have turned off more readers and reviewers than dialogue in poetry. Mr. Sharma's Hindi did not interfere with the sensibility of the poem, but enhanced it as Pound's Attic Greek never really could for me.

I could not in good faith put this collection down until I had read straight through it, because when Sharma writes:

Where is the Saraswati?
What is her colour?
Where does she inhabit?
Why don't you allow
An island to come up here

And let me have a hutment there,
O *Papamochini*!

he has asked himself, but is also asking his people, and the world, meaning me too, 'where are these glories of the past'? He is at once a serious magician of language and nuance but is also the imp prodding our conscience. He is a lyrical spirit, dancing around the frivolities and insults of our modern world. He manages to blend not only cultural traditions but also the micro with the macro. These are just a few of the signs of wonder which Sharma has shown us and taught us with this remarkable work.

He also can be as topical as anyone when he's told us:

I don't want to bury
The glories of the past;
I don't want to fetter
The freedom of the past;
I don't want to gag
The chanting of the *rishis*' mantras;
I don't want to hide
The development of the past;

I don't want to ride
The jet of the present;
I don't want to bombard
The world with poison;
I don't want to be a Blair
Or a Clinton to enchain the world.

I just want my *Ganga*
To be my *Ganga*.
Om jai Gange mahajaiiii...!

There is no fear here to speak not only the mind, but the heart. He has come to us with a gentle but firm, and loving, paternal take on life. He has shown us the beauties of India and the mythos which surrounds it, and sown within us a love for more. As an anthropologist and poet myself I have long looked for a way to combine the two without it sounding fake and 'put on'. Keeping it real has always been a guide for me, and is how I prefer to write and read. Mr. Sharma has found a natural way to do this and has given us, with this collection and the one before it, a new sense of how English poetry, written by an outsider, can really be. It is hard to find any fault with this remarkable collection, since he, like *Candide*, has managed to have the best of both worlds and been able to present them as one, intact universe.

After living with these poems for a few days, I can safely reiterate in a rather inept paraphrase, a part of one of Sharma's best poems from this wonderful collection: Yes...what IS the use of his education if he doesn't have his *Vishnupadi*? And I can agree with some degree of assurance that mine would be just as useless without having knowledge of poets such as Susheel Kumar Sharma.

He does not let us forget that the immensities of this world do not have to mean large chasms between humans. This is common ground with a warm, welcome feel to it, which indeed, leads us to a door that much more than half open.

***Kenneth Lumpkin** (b. 1951): writer; poet; musician; gardener; friend of all animals; teaches Anthropology at William Paterson (US); lives in London, Ontario (Canada)

VI

ROY ROBERT DE VOS*



Susheel Kumar Sharma's latest collection is in equal parts a deeply personal odyssey and a beseeching lament of the current state of India. It opens appropriately with a prayer, a prayer in the form of a poem – "Ganga Mata", dedicated to the eternal spirit which flows through the river Ganges, the epitome of Indian history, social class, mores and the essential life blood of the nation. This poem is in itself an independent stand-alone work of all encompassing depth;

creating a vision of a powerful, energetic and unstoppable force constantly underlying every action and thought. The images and customs associated with the Ganges are vividly brought alive in the reader's mind as the poet implores the spirit of the river to acknowledge him and his personal psychological yearning to become whole, as one with the ancient soul of the river and so also with the soul of the Indian nation.

I want a small moorage
In an island created by you.
Allow me to have my way, O *Suranadi*!
Grant me my wish, O *Girija*!

The almost primal yearning for the pure spirit of the river to be unleashed from the chains of modern development is echoed in the disgust for the dissolute society which controls the commerce of modern day India.

Who has put you in chains, O *Amarapaga*!
Who has stopped your flow, O *Purandara*!
Who has dumped his waste in you, O *Sursari*!

Who has diverted your way, O *Bhagirathi*!
Why have you accepted it all, O *Tridhara*?

And then he asks the unanswerable question:

How have you tolerated it all, O *Saritamvara*?

And this is the crux of the matter; how has India managed to survive the transition from being the source of spiritual philosophy, architecture, music, poetry and tolerance and yet still function with self-respect in a world alien to those original values? He goes on:

What is the use
Of my education --
This engineering
medicine
agriculture
law
mathematics
botany
physics ...
If I don't have my *Vishnupadi*?

How can he live in the absence of the underlying supportive spirit of the eternal river, which is more than simply a waterway? It is that which is embodied with and has become the repository of the outpouring emotions of thousands of years and millions of people. It seems impossible, but in the same way that the Ganges has survived, battered, polluted and abused, so must he and so must India.

From Kolkata to Gangotri
Just one scene —
Poverty, squalor, dirt, sloth and melancholy.
Everyone is weeping bitterly.
Everyone is crying hoarsely.
Everyone is worried knowingly.

No one has a solution!

Yes, India is one!

United we stand,
Divided we fall.

One voice
Ganga is ours —
Release Ganga —
Mokshadayini Ganga!

Gange tav darshanan mukti
Har har Gange,
Har har Gange.

This intense emotional exploration sets the tone for the rest of the collection in which personal conflicts and fears are aligned to the fraught situation of a national culture which is sometimes like a mother and sometimes like a thief. In “Spineless – II” he expresses this disconsolate regret that what should be firm and solid is actually not so but is rather a fearful and timid thing:

My conscience
Is like my vintage car
That refuses to move
At the appointed hour.

And then in “Crisis” he reinforces his rejection of the social expectations of those of his status and class and realizes that his introspection has developed a disenchantment within himself of the undercurrents of intrigues of his peers. This introspection though, does not prevent him from sharp and insightful observation of his physical world and fellow neighbours and expressing these observations in language which instantly creates a sense of the

moment, drawing one into his mind and experiencing his same emotional turmoil.

What is most striking in this collection of work is Professor Sharma’s lack of privacy in describing his emotional states and in some way this work is a confession; an assessment of a life lived as well as could be in a country of vastly differing lifestyles and in a time of political upheaval and uncertainty. This honesty extends to his interactions with his family; his relationship with his uncle and son, both of whom were victims of war; the uncle indirectly and the son directly and is examined and dissected in a courageous and sometimes brutal fashion.

The tide will turn and
The full moon will rise.
He will jump from the window
To fathom a new image
Or a new grief.
That is not the end of the world.

Even though he allows us to see that at times there is an element of a lacklustre emptiness, a feeling of ennui and lack of direction, he still has the capacity to continue writing and exploring his inner being. This is especially so in the poems “Camouflage” and “Dwellings”, where he laments that:

The tree of money sheds its leaves
For Autumn had come
But Spring could not
Locate my home.
Laden with colourful leaves
Hope passed by like a stranger on the road.
I salt my breakfast with tears
That ooze on the peeling of memories
When the butter of praise

Fails to soothe me
 I go out to the arms of downstream
 Where I drown in eternal sleep
 To awake floating on a fresh dream.

Susheel's work has the marvellous capacity of immediacy, one feels involved and completely caught up in the narrative and this is intensely felt in the poem "Poverty: Some Scenes". I feel this piece and also "For a Bride Who Thinks of Suicide" are exceptionally important commentaries on the tragedy of the poor and the conflict of traditional life in the fast paced western style society which is enveloping Indian cities today. Interspersed among these are works which are at times harrowing in their blinding candour ... "A Wish", "Passing By" and then we are charmed by "Granny":

Today I've seen a brick come out of the wall
 In the ancestral house in the ancestral street.
 I tried to fix it without cement but it came out –
 I somehow saved my foot from being hurt.
 Twenty years ago my granny would not have let
 The wall go unrepaired

There is much beauty in this collection and also much tragedy. And in this Susheel Sharma has succeeded; firstly to portray the tragedy of poverty with compassion and understanding and secondly to portray the beauty in the form of human emotions, striving to understand our state of being in this often confusing and difficult place in which we are born and grow.

The glossary of terminology, names and phrases is an excellent addition. As Professor Sharma explains: "Words convey ideas imbued with cultural significance which is mostly lost in translation" the glossary fulfils its purpose of translating and describing Hindu mythology, ritual and culture in a way which enriches the readings.

This is a wonderfully crafted collection; the language is beautifully descriptive, to the extent that one almost feels the hot, dusty road and sees the orange ball of the sun floating above the endless Ganges. Yet the emotional upheavals, the triumphs, the churning of human endeavour, leave one at the same time despairing and uplifted. It has been a privilege to read and comment on this collection.

*Though **Roy Robert de Vos** lives in Cape Town (South Africa) yet he has a deep affinity with the traditions of India. He is a Sufi, following the teachings of the Sufi Saint Hazrat Inayat Khan. Besides, he has followed the *hatha yoga* practice outlined by Gururji B.K.S Iyengar for some thirty years. He is a contributor to the Scientific and Medical Network, an independent educational charity that explores the intersection of science, philosophy and spirituality, based in the UK. He is the author of *Living in the Here and Now - a guide to walking the mystic path*. He is the founder of "The Occasional Poets' Salon" on Facebook which hosts the work of an international group of poets.
